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CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

Maxwell Struthers Burt

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SHORT

STORY

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CHANCE ENCOUNTERS



My first sight of Mr. Peace was impressive.

[Page 117

CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

BY

MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT

Author of "John O'May and Other Stories"

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY

N. C. WYETH

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1921

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TO WALTER GILKYSON, ESQ.

MY DEAR WALTER:

I feel that I owe you a dedication for two reasons: one, because you are a most excellent writer of that keen, sweet thing, the English tongue; and, two, because you have, as a friend, to use the title of one of your own stories, the genius of "the illumined moment." It is a rare genius; perhaps the rarest there is.

You are an escaped Quaker, which gives you perspective and vision and liberation, but you are also a Pennsylvanian, which gives you tradition and balance. You have for these reasons, therefore, the unusual and startling ability of walking straight through a world where the path of thought is thorny with delusion. Or to change the metaphor, you are a prizable Daniel in the midst of sleepy lions.

But after all, what I am telling you is common property to many, and what I like best to think of is the uncommon property we hold together; of nights in spring when we have sat up over some rose colored delicate incentive to imagina-

Dedication

tion—now denied to us—and talked the stars down; of nights when we have watched the lights in Rose Valley; of starlit nights in Wyoming; or of those many stirring moments when, coming from various quarters of the earth, we have met again after long absence.

These are memories and anticipations worth while to a man; windows in that excellent building, friendship, and I am grateful to you for them.

So I remain, my dear Walter, faithfully yours,

MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT.

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*X Decided to be the best short story
of 1920 (by the D. Henry memorial
committee)*

CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

THE SCARLET HUNTER

THIS story about Dowson has always seemed to me interesting. It contains a revelation. Cursorily one wouldn't imagine any such thing happening to Dowson; even if one knew his portraits—as every one does; even if one had seen him, as Philipse did that winter, frequently and intimately and in the naked loneliness of a snow-bound country. Philipse is the narrator—the discloser, I might almost call him; and there is nothing important to remember about Philipse except that he is an imaginative and pleasant fellow who owns a cattle-ranch in some out of the way part of Wyoming—a big mountain country, I gather; Star Valley, or some such name as that. Picture Philipse somewhere—on the porch of a friend's house, or in a friend's drawing-room—speaking in his quiet reflective voice and gesturing occasionally with his right hand, a curiously plump right hand for a rancher, until you notice the callous spots at the base of the fingers.

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You recall the penumbra surrounding Dowson; the tales that have collected about the great shadow he cast across the world? Philipse prefaces his story by reminding you of them. Dowson was huge; he had a ragged, dusty mustache; he talked only at intervals, and then never about art; he loathed women, although he was married; in his leisure hours he smoked enormously and exercised and ate with a silent ferocity almost frightening. Women said about him—in fact one of them had said this very thing to Philipse: “A coarse man, my dear. Not a grain of imagination! A ‘Slovenly Peter’. How he can paint the things he does, I don’t know—but then of course he is an indefatigable worker.”

He had, you see, become a tradition; was no longer in the eyes of most people human. This seems to be a penalty of very great greatness. Paradoxically enough, the figure of a man decreases as his statue as an artist grows. You begin to suspect that personally here is a very ordinary person; you like to suspect it. You even vaguely postulate subnormality; conjecture possession by a *dæmon*—as if there were an open cave, the very emptiness of which left it all the more free to the winds of beauty. In some subtle way such superstitions flatter the knowl-

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edge we have of our own normal inadequacy. For a great artist is, of course, both a great artist and a great man; a human man as well—big and little. There is no other way. Philipse found it out. Dowson was human; very: a little ludicrous, a little pathetic, struggling. Every one is.

And now here, so Philipse tells you, was this great man, this traditional monster, come unexpectedly to be his neighbor—his only neighbor—through six, perhaps seven, months of snowy isolation. Months that test, in a way impossible to describe to those who have not experienced sub-arctic weather, the hearts of the people who live through them. "You see," says Philipse, "my ranch and the one he was to inhabit—Tulletson's, four miles up the river—were the only human spots in an expanse of thirty miles; and although that is nothing in summer, particularly in these days of Fords, it is all the world in winter, when the roads are six feet deep in snow, and the only way to get about is on snowshoes and skis." . . . Philipse delivers a lecture on the effect of solitariness and cold upon the human mind—no, not a lecture, it is only two paragraphs or so long, and the sentences are short and pointed in the way of sentences of men who live much alone. Philipse's voice stirs with the tenseness of one to whom the

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sardonic vagaries of nature are so familiar, so poignant, that even within four warm walls, with lamps lit, and a lady giving him tea, only a moment is needed to recall the baffled hate a blizzard produces in those who have to fight it. "You have to get through your head," says Philipse, "the kind of thing Dowson was coming to before you can understand fully what happened to him—and to me, too, for you see I had a revelation as well."

And you do "get it through your head" partly, before Philipse is done. You achieve something of a picture of frost. Of a blind white expanse stretching on all sides; sparkling like sun-dust in clear weather; driven, tortured, whirling, when storms, some of them lasting three weeks, are abroad: an apocalyptical expanse, where huge mountains, piercingly aloof on blue, ice-bound days, surge into blood-red splendor at sunset, and where, along the river banks, by dusk and by early morning, iris-tinted mists weave and figure and coil like spirits of the north. And yet, despite all this movement and color, an expanse so predominately still, so clear, so crystal, that within the great globe of shining glass in which you seem to be caught you hear snow drop from pine trees with the sound of a thousand little wings flying.

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A dangerous country; heady; too strong. A man either becomes very small, and huddles about the stove, and hates himself and his neighbors, or else he becomes larger than is his wont. At all events, the atmosphere between him and what he chooses to call God is thinned.

"I never thought that Dowson was really coming until he was there," says Philipse, "although Tulletson had assured me that he was. One wouldn't think a man, particularly Dowson, would choose Wyoming as a winter resort. But he wanted to paint mountains—mountains with snow on them. 'And he will,' said Tulletson in October, four weeks before Dowson was to arrive; 'he will; he'd paint hell if he'd made his mind up to it. I know him; I lived three years with him in Paris during the time I thought I was going to be an artist. Well, be good to him. You and he will have this end of the country to yourselves—I'm not counting your foreman, or my foreman, or your ranch-hands, or my ranch-hands, and I'm particularly not counting Mrs. Dowson.'

"Tulletson got on his horse. He had ridden down to say good-by to me. Next day he was going to Southern California. He was quite content to turn over the winter and, incidentally,

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his ranch to Dowson; he himself had seen enough of Northwestern winters, so he said, to last him a lifetime.

" 'Is Mrs. Dowson coming out?' I asked.

"Tulletson stared thoughtfully at the mountains. 'Yes,' he said. 'Oh, yes, she's coming out. They're importing a young woman with them, too, a cousin of hers, or something.' He chuckled and looked at me between his narrowed, sun-wrinkled eyelids. 'I'll bet you a dollar you marry her!' he added.

" 'I'll bet you a dollar I don't!' I retorted. Then, because I am a very shy man and so cherish a suppressed curiosity about women, and hate to ask about them, but always do, and because there had been something odd in Tulletson's tones, I pressed him to tell me what Mrs. Dowson was like. It would be a new side-light on Dowson.

" 'Mrs. Dowson—?' Tulletson reflected. 'Mary's her name. Well, let me see! Give me the makings.' I handed him my tobacco and he rolled a cigarette and looked speculatively at the mountains again. 'I'll tell you,' he proceeded; 'she reminds me of a burnt-out torch. She was very lovely at one time; one of those straight, slim blondes, very keen, with a sort of cool, hidden fire. But life writes too sharply on the faces of

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blondes.' He paused, as if weighing his words even more deeply: 'No,' he said, 'a burnt-out torch is a rotten simile. She's more like a naiad who has fed the water of her spring to a thirsty knight until suddenly she finds there's no more water there. Dowson's an absorbing devil, you know. I suppose it's one aspect of genius. He engulfs you as a polyp engulfs its food, and all the while he doesn't know that he's doing it at all. Well—good-by. Write me to Santa Barbara—you won't. Don't let Dowson bully you; if you don't you'll find him one of the dearest fellows in the world.' He waved his hand.

"And that was the end of Tulletson. He rode away into the shadows of the leafless aspen grove that came down to the back of my house; rode away with a blue sea at the end of his journey, and left me to winter and Dowson.

"But at first it wasn't much of Dowson. A month passed and I heard he had arrived; another month, and I was beginning to get angry. You see, Dowson was too great a man to drop in upon casually. I felt that in this instance he should reverse precedent and make the first advances. Besides, Tulletson had told me that he would. And it is all very well to be famous and

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incessantly busy, but it is necessary, particularly in a lonely country, to be a trifle human as well. Here was Dowson only four miles above me and yet not a word from him. And here, also, was winter settling down in earnest. The dull indecision of a cloudy fortnight was gathering into a storm. There was that curious menace in the air that precedes snow. One felt that something of immense, not altogether happy importance was about to happen. It was. We were in for the first blizzard of the year.

"And then, in the night, out of the ten-o'clock darkness and fury of a storm that had been going on for three days, came a tinkle of my telephone bell that at once destroyed the wall of irritation I had been building up between Dowson and myself. Dowson's voice spoke; gruff, as if annoyed, certainly uncomplaisant. 'Yes? What could I do for him? Well, it was too bad, but Miss Darnell—yes, his wife's cousin—well, she had something the matter with her. Pains in her side. Nothing very serious, he hoped, but still—isolated that way! Could I notify the doctor? Where was he to be found? At Cooper? That was the little town down the valley, wasn't it?'"

"I assured him that I would not only notify the doctor, but that I would be up immediately my-

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self. Probably twenty-four hours would elapse before the doctor could cover the thirty snow-driven miles—for the last eight of which snow-shoes would be necessary—whereas I could be there shortly, and many years in frontier countries had taught me a fairly practical knowledge of simple illnesses. Would that be all right?

“‘All right?’ At the moment I learned the first of the many things I was to learn about Dowson. There was a silence and then his voice came again. ‘All right?—My dear fellow! You are good!—too good! A night like this? Yes, yes, Tulletson told me you were good.’ And you see, if I had never heard Dowson speak again, from that minute I should have liked him. It wasn’t simply that he was getting something he wanted; lots of voices are pleasant when that happens; but—well, over a telephone a voice is peculiarly revealing. You have only it to judge by. I wonder how many of the people who think they know Dowson so well have ever heard him speak in tones of relief and gratitude?

“I put on my mackinaw and my fur helmet and strapped on my snow-shoes. The snow was still too new and wet to use skis. Once outside, the wind, coming from the southwest, almost took my feet from under me. There was a blinding,

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whirling, demoniac tempest of snowflakes, but the storm was at my back, and by following the river bank, through a country I knew as well as I did my own backyard, there was little danger of my losing the way.

"Have you ever drifted before a blizzard? It creates a curious mood of detachment. To face it, to feel the cutting snow in your face, the cutting wind, sooner or later makes you sullen and irritated, as if some half-insane, roaring giant was slapping you, insulting you. But to go the other way is utterly different. There is little physical effort, and you are so shut out from the rest of the world, from familiar landmarks, that you experience a sort of dull comfort and peace—as if you and your objective you were huddling close about a small warm spot in the midst of a world of outer desolation. Your heart is the warm spot, I suppose. At all events, when you come to your destination, if you are not too cold, your senses are peculiarly alert. Your powers of observation, you see, except for those that keep you to your direction, have had a rest from their usual ceaseless activity.

"There was a faint, blurred light glimmering through the blustering uncertainty of the storm; and then a bank of snow, where the wind had

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piled it up away from the front of Tulletson's house. I dropped down this to the frozen boards of Tulletson's porch, and knocked on his heavy front door. Dowson himself threw it open, standing with the warm glow of the room making an aureole about his shaggy head. His huge figure almost filled the aperture; he peered uncertainly into the darkness.

"That you, Philipse?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Come in! Come in! What a night! It's worth coming all this way to see! I'd like to be out in it. Twisted about; fighting. Are you tired?"

"I told him I wasn't. I left my snow-shoes on the porch and followed him through the door, shutting it behind me with difficulty. Then I took a breath of the sudden peace and warmth and silence in which I found myself. Beyond the doubled small windows and the stout door of the heavy-set, meandering log house, the storm made itself known only by a soft, continuous slithering of snow and wind, except that every now and then a gust, particularly strong, rattled down the big chimney of the open fireplace, in which some logs were smoldering. In one corner a stove hummed sleepily.

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"'We're immensely comfortable,' said Dowson. 'Immensely! What a good chap Tulletson was to let us have it! It's a lovely room—those skins, and the shape of it, and those hangings! The light touches the logs with the most marvelous tints—like port and sherry and Madeira in old bottles. I had no idea you lived this way in this wilderness. I haven't been so happy in years. Work! There aren't hours enough in the day!'

"He drew up a big chair in front of the fire and motioned me to another. That ragged, rather beautiful, somewhat tragic face of his was in profile, clearly outlined, as he filled his pipe. He had a curious, impersonal way of talking and of gesturing, and of looking while he talked. You felt that here was a man kindly enough, possibly greatly so when there was any real necessity for kindness, but otherwise so involved in his own visions that he was not always objectively alert. And silence and talk seemed to be practically the same thing to him. In the presence of another person his thoughts became oral simply because that was the conventional thing for them to become. You were aware of a constant process of vision, discrimination, elimination, retention of the worth while, and of an unfaltering progress.

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I forgot completely Miss Darnell and the pains in her side. Dowson did, too. He wanted to talk at length about the country he had so suddenly found himself in, and about the new impressions that were swarming about his head like bees. He seemed to me a man who delighted in companionship, and yet who could go for months without it, merely because obtaining it meant an interruption of his work. I had forgot Mrs. Dowson as completely as I had Miss Darnell and her pains, until I heard a slight sound behind us. I looked up and saw the former standing between the folds of the heavy double curtain that separated us from the room to the right; she was holding the dull crimson stuff apart, her arms outstretched. I jumped to my feet. She smiled and came forward.

“ ‘Mr. Philipse, you must think us odd neighbors. But then I rather expected you to call first, although Mr. Tulletson said you wouldn’t.’

“I shook my head. ‘You must remember,’ I dissented, ‘that your husband has reached that happy state of eminence where common mortals respect his time.’

“She smiled, but without interest. ‘Oh, yes,’ she said, and her eyes were withdrawn, ‘that’s

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true, I suppose. It's another one of the difficulties of having married a famous man.'

"There had been nothing very much out of the way in this remark, although I had perceived, of course, the presence of some small, hidden wound, so I was unprepared for Dowson's ill-concealed impatience. He got up out of his chair savagely and turned towards me: 'To be constantly reminded,' he said, 'that you work hard and sell a few pictures, is enough to make any man a monster. Women are supposed to be tactful; I've never met one yet tactful enough to be quiet.'

"Altogether unpresentable and unpleasant. I felt ashamed for both myself and Dowson, as one does under circumstances of the kind. Apparently there is some fundamental inhibition which forbids male-kind to be rude to its wives except before intimate friends, and Dowson had broken it. But Mrs. Dowson seemed accustomed; she merely veiled her eyes again beneath drooping eyelids, and then looked up and smiled.

" 'Iris,' she said, 'is in considerable pain. If Mr. Philipse can do anything—'

"I stepped forward immediately. 'Come back when you are through,' demanded Dowson; 'we'll talk. I'm afraid I'll have to make you up

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a bed on the divan. This house is large, but it isn't built for much over-night entertaining.'

"I followed Mrs. Dowson through the unlit room to the right, and then down a narrow passageway that ended in a closed door, a thread of light showing underneath.

" 'She's in here,' she said. She threw open the door and I found myself in Tulletson's guest-room, where in the past I had often slept. Now it was entirely changed; transformed by hands to whom chintz and soft down and carefully tended dressing-tables were matters of necessity. It was very charming; the storm was entirely shut out. Except for the log walls and the little glowing stove in one corner, one might have been in an inner room of any Eastern house. In the slim, white-counterpaned bed, propped up against the pillows, a young girl was staring at us.

"A young girl in bed is a heart-breaking enough thing anyhow; they—all of them—look so young, and soft, and as if the gay armor of the day had been put aside; a little silly, too; but this young girl was particularly heart-breaking, for her wide, dark eyes were frightened. I could tell by the flush that overlaid her naturally fine dusky color that she had fever. My sympathy went out to

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her. In a short while it was to go back where it belonged.

"Now, here is an incident that always makes doctors angry—most doctors; doctors who haven't lived in countries where doctors are hard to come by. For I took Miss Darnell's temperature with a thermometer, you see, and I asked her questions, and I discovered, just as surely as if I had had a medical degree, that she had pleurisy; then I gave her certain directions and proceeded to do the best thing any doctor can ever do, and that is to attempt to reinforce the courage of his patient. I told Miss Darnell that she wasn't dangerously ill; I informed her that a real doctor was even then on his way and would be at the ranch by morning; I think I even tried to be sympathetically humorous. I discovered something. It was then that my sympathy went back where it belonged. Miss Darnell was horribly sorry for herself and intended to make everybody else equally so. She was annoyed at my lack of immediate response to her beauty and ill-fortune. 'How old are you?' I asked.

"She thought it was a medical question. 'Twenty-seven.'

"'I thought you were only twenty,' I said.

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'You look only twenty.' She brightened at this, but I went on. 'Well, then, if you're twenty-seven, you're old enough to know that gallantry is one-half the battle in everything—including illness. This is dry pleurisy, not pneumonia. With the slightest care you won't die.'

"She turned her large and very beautiful eyes upon me, and I was aware that I had made an enemy. I had been rude—I had meant to be. I wanted to sting her to resistance. In a country like that, where every minute of the day is a battle of some kind, you find you have little patience with spoiled women; even less with spoiled men. I had seen too many silent people in tiny cabins smile back contemptuously at a death that sat waiting for them, with a monstrous patience, at the foot of their narrow beds.

"I drew my eyes away from Miss Darnell's eyes, suddenly become implacable, and glanced towards the corner of the room where, during this conversation, Mrs. Dowson had been standing. Afterwards I thought I had had a real compulsion, but I imagine that was merely the wisdom of hind-sight. At all events, when I looked I received rather a shock. Mrs. Dowson was unaware of my inspection; she was staring broodingly at the younger woman, and if ever I had

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seen disdain and bitter dislike written on any one's face they were at that moment written on Mrs. Dowson's mouth and in her veiled blue eyes.

"She became aware of my attention. 'Iris isn't used to this sort of thing,' she explained with a little laugh. 'In her life doctors come and go like maid-servants when you ring a bell.' Her voice was merely lazily amused; there was no scorn in it. 'You must be tired,' she continued. 'I'll take you back to the main room and make you up a bed. Don't let Gregory talk you to death; when he does talk, he does it like everything else—passionately.' We left Miss Darnell reflecting upon unexpected insults.

"In the narrow, dark passageway Mrs. Dowson dropped a spool of yarn she was carrying and turned on an electric flashlight she had been holding unused in her hand. For an instant her face was lit more distinctly than I had yet seen it; suddenly coming into view in a circle of clear light from the background of shadows, but in such a way that all but the main lines were obliterated. I realized what I had not definitely realized before. She was still a very lovely woman. Possibly a trifle too delicately chiseled by time and by thought, as Tulletson had said, as her type of beauty is likely to become, but if

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anything all the more appealing for that fact. And her eyes, especially, were very arresting; when she opened them wide, as now, they were young and big. At the moment they were shining like two stars.

"Then the light went out. I handed her her spool of yarn. 'Who is Miss Darnell?' I asked. 'I hope you won't think I'm presumptuous, but in this country one is always immensely interested in new people—one likes to know their histories; what they are like. It's a queer country; direct in certain ways; certain kinds of manners don't count for as much as they do in other places.'

"In the darkness her voice answered me, a slight hesitation in it. 'Yes,' she said, 'I've noticed that already myself. I think I'm becoming uncivilized. . . . Miss Darnell? There isn't much to tell. She's my second cousin. No—! Not my secretary, nor companion. Nothing like that. She's a very rich young woman in her own right. She came out here because she wanted to and because I thought it would do her good.' There was a longer silence. 'I don't know whether it will do her good or not.'

"We discovered Dowson still sitting in the chair before the fire, his long legs stretched out upon a stool. 'Sit down!' he commanded. 'Sit

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down! I want to talk to you about skiing. Will we get lots of it out here? I've done just a little in Switzerland, and I think it's the most beautiful thing in the world—inhuman; much more so than the airplane. It's like eloping with the Frost Queen. Sit down!

"The next morning the doctor came; a young man made serious by the miles of fatigue that usually lay between him and his combats with disease. He, too, became irritated with Miss Darnell. She was not in the slightest danger; everything I had done was correct; she had a very mild attack; in a short time she would be up and about. As I strapped on my snowshoes to go home, Dowson, his hair blown by the storm which was still raging, waved an impatient hand. 'Women,' he announced, 'should never be taken anywhere. They are the great deterrents to adventure, mental or physical. Except—' He paused. 'Except the greatest adventure of all, I suppose, which is themselves; but to follow that properly a man shouldn't do anything else—he shouldn't paint, for instance. Well, good-by. I'll be down soon to see you.' In a day or so, true to his word, he appeared.

"I realized that he had discovered me and so had made me a permanent feature of his landscape;

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otherwise he might have lived next to me a year and have been aware of me only vaguely, as something disturbing to which he owed some sort of social obligation, but what, he couldn't be bothered to determine. As it was, he snow-shoed down once or twice a week; blowing in out of the storm like a huge snow genie, his mustache and eyebrows hoary with frost. My men liked him; he was obviously so much of a man. They thought him some sort of super-sign-painter; had they known that this immense man worked with comparatively miniature brushes on small squares of canvas their sense of fitness would have been disturbed. Sometimes Dowson talked incessantly; sometimes he did nothing but smoke. I couldn't make out whether he was a man fundamentally discontented, with moments of exhilaration, or a man fundamentally exhilarated, with moments of depression. He and my foreman, Dubois, French-Canadian, got along together famously. Dubois had enough of the Gallic in him to meet warmly the artist in Dowson. Dubois told Dowson French-Canadian folk tales. I can see the two of them now sitting close to the stove, smoking, nodding their heads gravely, the huge grizzled man and the small black man; Dubois totally

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unaware of the fact that he was sitting where some of the greatest people in the world had wished to sit, but hadn't always been able to do so.

"One night Dubois told the story of 'The Scarlet Hunter', and Dowson loved it; partly, I suppose, because it is a snow story and he was in a snow country, but mostly, I am sure, for the chromatics it contains. He nodded his head violently. 'Perfectly!' he ejaculated. 'I see it exactly! Bully! A white night, a "night of glass", as you call it: full moonlight and no color except the darkness of the pines off to one side and the greenness of the sky! And this fellow, this whatever he is, snow-shoeing—no, it would have to be skiing; that's so much more beautiful—at a little distance from you, but parallel. Exactly! A red mackinaw and a red cap, and a face you couldn't see—! Marvelous! Like a streak of blood across the snow!'

" 'E always wears snow-shoes, M'sieu,' objected Dubois.

" 'I won't have it!' insisted Dowson. 'He must be on skis.' He got up to go. We went to the door with him. He stood in the yellow pennon of light flung out upon the darkness. A fine snow was falling. 'I take it,' he said, 'that this means the end of the storm. Suppose "the Scarlet

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Hunter" catches me to-night, Dubois? What shall I do—talk French to him? I don't think he means sure death, anyhow. He might mean just the opposite, life, for instance. Somebody must have met him and lived to tell the tale, or else how would we know anything about him?"

"Dubois waved an entirely serious hand. '*Bo Soir*, M'sieu'! No, M'sieu' won't see 'im. M'sieu' is too enormously strong. Besides, this is not his night; it is warm.'

"You remember the legend of 'the Scarlet Hunter,' don't you? You would if you had ever been north of Quebec. If you are lost, you see, and are dying of cold, in the last few minutes, when your heart and brain are numbed and the tears of weariness frozen on your cheeks, you hear suddenly a faint dipping of snow-shoes—so! Just like that!—and you turn your head, and there beside you 'runs' a man; a man in scarlet, warm scarlet; and suddenly you are strong again and content, and the blood stirs once more in your veins, and you snow-shoe into heaven like a good *courier du bois* with a little song on your lips. I have heard sometimes just before the end 'the Scarlet Hunter' builds a small fire and you and he sit down on opposite sides of it, and say noth-

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ing, and smoke, and gradually you doze off into a sleep—the long sleep—but I think that's an addition. Also, as Dowson so justly said, a few must have seen 'the Scarlet Hunter' and lived to tell the tale, for how otherwise would any one have heard of his existence?

"I smiled at Dubois when Dowson had disappeared into the night. 'There's a strange man, Adolphe!' I said. 'He's one of the greatest men in the world, and yet he half believes what you've been telling him.'

"I remember that the teeth of Dubois, the teeth of an atheist, shut with a click. 'But Meestar Philipse,' he said, 'it is quite true, or I wouldn't have said so.' Queer French matter-of-factness!

"I dare say you will think that in all this description of Dowson I am neglecting the women who were with him, and in a way I dare say that I actually did neglect them. Dowson was one of those occasional men who, when you are with them, have a way of eclipsing the womenfolk attached; not by rudeness or neglect, but by an immense masculinity and inevitableness. In Dowson's case there was an impression of coming upon a massive tree. Women seemed the incidental ivy. I doubt if women connected with such

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men ever obtrude their own inevitableness obviously except at the exact moments of giving birth to children. But the incidental ivy, of course, is greatly the concern of the tree; more master of it than it would be of a weaker shrub offering less foothold, although to an observer this is not patent, nor probably is it patent to the tree itself. . . . Dowson dashed in and out of his cabin, frequently forgetting his hat; Dowson made innumerable sketches, painted a few pictures; Dowson when I happened to be there, which was often, deluged me with anecdotes, argued, asked questions, or else was very silent, brooding, no doubt, over something he had seen and was planning to paint, his face expressionless and his gray eyes opaque.

"I could not gauge exactly the hidden polarities of these people so suddenly transported from all they had been accustomed to into a strange and releasing environment; I could not exactly follow their antagonisms and their agreements; their goings forward, withdrawals, neutralizations of each other. But that a rather tense drama was being enacted there was not the slightest doubt. One clear decision arose from my mystification, and that was strong confirmation of my original dislike of Miss Darnell. It was not an ordinary

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dislike; Miss Darnell was charming to look at; soft, warm, dark, sparkling, appealing; also she was clever in a ruthless way; much too clever, for instance, to show openly her distaste for me. But there were malfeasances for a hostile mind to catch hold upon. That appeal, for one thing, had back of it a most cool and practiced method. And yet, curiously enough, largely an unconscious method, not in its actual practice, perhaps, but in its origin. Miss Darnell was one of those women who by early training or by instinct fasten themselves as inevitably and as detrimentally upon a man as a mollusc fastens upon its victim. In her own way she was as much of a natural force as Dowson. So you felt a little sorry for her despite your contempt. And then, on top of your pity, you recalled the fact that after all she was entirely grown up and ought to know, even if she didn't, what she was doing. One couldn't forgive altogether the cruel use she was making of her young beauty against the faintly scarred loveliness of Mrs. Dowson.

"As for Dowson, he seemed rather like a giant shot in the foot by some minikin Jack, or rather Joan, of a giant-killer; slightly aware of the wound, and bothered—his head in the clouds—half-inclined to stoop down and see what was the

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matter, half-inclined to think it was mere imagination after all. I only hoped he wouldn't follow the precedent of the story and pick up his miniature opponent between his thumb and his forefinger and examine her too closely. That would be bad. He might shrink and she grow. I was sure, you see, no casual explanation would do; Dowson might be anything, but he was not a cad; Miss Darnell might accomplish any kind of ruin, but she would always be self-deceived. One could safely assume that she would offer the very 'highest of motives' at the very moment of cataclysm.

"Once or twice I thought I was on the eve of a clearer understanding, but at the last moment the clearness became again obscured. There was one evening, towards sunset, when I was skiing back to Tulletson's ranch with Mrs. Dowson. Ahead of us, sharp silhouettes in the green dusk, were the towering figure of Dowson and the smaller figure of his wife's cousin. A little new moon hung over the great bulk of mountains to the west. The blizzards of the early winter had dropped into the most still and luminous and eerily frozen weather. Your breath rose straight up from your mouth. The days were like blue suns; the nights like lunar

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spaces brought to earth. Dowson and his companion slid over the brow of a hill and were swallowed up in the white expanse; suddenly, as if a crevasse had opened beneath them. 'Come! We must hurry!' breathed Mrs. Dowson out of a long silence, and then, if anything, she moved forward more slowly than before. 'I wish life weren't so unfair!' she said, after another pause.

" 'I didn't know it really was,' I interjected.

" 'Obviously,' she remarked, 'you have never been a woman.'

"Here at last seemed a prospect of some sort of articulateness. 'Exactly what do you mean?' I asked.

"She studied her reply. 'Because women, if they live long enough, are caught in a web. It isn't fair. I suppose nature doesn't mean them to live. Just when they have reached a point where experience and emotion and the getting rid of unnecessary things makes them capable of building a fire and tending it, no one wants them any longer as priestesses.' She flung out the hand holding her ski pole in a wide gesture of despair. 'When inside we become worth loving,' she said, 'outside we are no longer lovable. I wish that every one could at times look straight into another person and see the inner figure.

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Sometimes there would be something very horrible; but oftener there would be a statue more beautiful than any that youth could build. There would be no undue lines; no overflowing. It would have the quintessential quality of flame. Have you ever thought—or hoped—that some time, for a minute perhaps, by the use of great will power, or by praying, or great suffering, you could step from the old battered self that people see and show the young thing that's your soul? Young! Of course! What's forty, or fifty, or eighty years? Just an instant, but the person you wanted to show it to would have an impression of slimness and radiance never to be forgot. Look out! And with a sudden fierce swoop she had gone down over the brow of the hill—a flying shadow, half lost in a scud of snow. I watched her until she had 'run' far out into the flat below and then followed her.

"Dowson took to rambling by moonlight; the little half-moon changing to a huge aloof topaz disc. He seemed slightly and continuously intoxicated by beauty. Frequently he would appear at my ranch at eight, or even nine o'clock at night, heralded by the whispering murmur of his skis upon the crusted snow. Once I thought that he, too, was on the point of revelation. He,

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too, talked about beauty, and he, too, used the word 'unfair.' Here were a couple of people who thought life unfair to them. I wondered what Miss Darnell thought.

"'I can't see,' he objected grumblingly, 'what the sense of form is in the world for anyway. Although I'd die if it wasn't here. But that's only because I'm one of the poor fools who are engrossed with it. But it makes trouble. When you're poor you're miserable because you have ugly surroundings; when you're rich you see the ugliness of money. Take this country, now! Its beauty—I'll hanker after it all the rest of my life. What's the use? I can't live on skis, in moonlight, in snow. It's the same thing with the human body. You're cheated. As the soul grows more beautiful the body grows uglier. For instance, I suppose having children is a wonderful spiritual experience, but does it leave a woman more beautiful?—actually, I mean; all this sentimental talk aside? I know what Rodin says, but that's philosophy, not art. Inhuman? Well, it's all very well to talk about the beauty of the soul, but that's one kind of beauty, and the beauty of the body is another. You can't convince me that in a real way a cathedral rubbed and dimmed by time is actually more beautiful than in its original

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clear outlines. That's getting the historical sense mixed up with the artistic. Both Whitman and Rodin rode their hobbies so they got themselves utterly confused. They are the Ruskins of sculpture and poetry. Great artists enough to dazzle the critics; sentimentalists enough to fool the ignorant. Good-by, I'm going. And the worst thing of all is to be an American who worships beauty— It can't be done. We're horrid hybrids; half artist; half puritan. Whole-hearted, never. I'm going to ski to the base of that mountain and back.'

" 'Is M'sieu' well wrapped up?' asked Dubois. 'Last night it fell to forty below zero.'

" 'Wrapped up in my own thoughts,' grumbled Dowson. 'And they're irritating enough to keep anybody warm.' The whisper of his skis died away on the night.

"From the heavy sleep of three o'clock I was awakened by the tinkle of my telephone bell, and very eerie it sounded, too, in the walled-in quiet of my room. Mrs. Dowson's voice, a chord-like quality of anxiety about it, was at the other end of the wire.

" 'Had I seen Gregory? No, he was not back. Yes, worried, naturally. Did I know it was forty-five below? He said he would be back in a couple

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of hours.' I tried to reassure her; told her I would set out at once myself; would send all my men; instructed her to send her own in a widening circle; begged her not to be worried. Then I awoke Dubois and the others, and we dressed ourselves in the pallid lamplight, and strapped on our skis, and put little bottles of brandy in our pockets.

"Dubois smiled grimly from underneath his helmet. 'Ere's a night for "the Scarlet One", M'sieu'. I go southwest; you go west, in the direction in which I think M'sieu' Dowson is. I will send the boys north and south, and along the river bank. They should go in couples, they are young.' He waved his hand. I rather wished he were going along with me. It was incredibly lonely; incredibly unreal; and Dubois was a child of the cold. He seemed to have a reticent understanding with it that I, for all my years of experience, could not achieve.

"My way lay across the flats of the river bottom, then up a 'bench' like a knife edge, and then across another flat to where the dark outline of the pine forests at the foot of the mountains began. As I slipped along, I searched the country on either side with my eyes; occasionally I called. Once or twice I shot my revolver. The cold of

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its grip burned through even the double thickness of my gloves. A wind had stirred the fine snow above the crust so that it was useless to search for tracks.

"Eventually I came to the motionless shadows of the trees, spreading little dark pools in the whiteness below. Here was a new world, no longer vacant, but filled with noiseless shapes and, one could almost imagine, movement and conversation just beyond one's senses. It was here that I thought surely I would find Dowson; I remembered the frozen tarn he so delighted in telling me about. But I did not allow myself to think what I might find. Such thoughts are bad in emergencies. Once, however, I did catch myself reflecting. 'For such a thing as Miss Darnell is this light going to be put out?' Well, it wouldn't be the first time in the history of the world.

"And then suddenly, out of the unbroken shadow and open spaces of a fir-dotted hillside, down into a small hollow where I was standing, hurtled a huge black shape; passed me with a roar of torn snow, fell, twisted about, and lay struggling. The onslaught was so terrific that for a moment I forgot that bears were hibernating and tugged at my gun. Then I saw that it was Dowson. Without noticing me, he floundered

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with painful effort to his feet and slid, swaying, to a nearby tree and leaned against it, one arm encircling it. He looked at me calmly and with dislike. The moonlight was as clear as day.

“‘Curse you,’ he said; ‘you’ve been following me about for three hours and I want to know who you are.’ His voice was thick and frozen. ‘Oh, yes, I heard you out there on the flat! You thought I didn’t, didn’t you? Very clever, but I heard the lisp of your skis long before I turned my head. Scarlet—! What do I care? Scarlet or indigo! What I want to know is, who are you? Death? Well, why don’t you hurry up, then? You’ve almost got me. I can’t see any more; I can’t feel much. Every time I chase you, you run from me, and when I run, you’re on my heels. You’re not death! Death’s brave. I know what you are! You’re—’ he laughed a sudden, blurred, insane laugh,—‘you’re the thing a man’s got inside of him. You’re the— What do they call it? I know! You’re the Categorical Imperative! Cat—well, damn you, I’m going to fool you. I’m done. You can’t follow me where I’m going.’

“You realize, I suppose, what this sounded like in that hidden, breathless hollow; this frozen, delirious, unearthly babble, with its ludicrous

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mixture of excruciation, horror, and transcendental philosophy?

"I stepped forward gingerly, for I didn't want Dowson to grapple with me.

" 'Dowson!—Gregory!'

"He turned his tortured head and stared at me; then he gave a little gasp, and the arm about the tree slid down until it was hanging by his side. 'You!' he said. 'How did you find me?'

"I laughed encouragingly. 'I can always find you,' I answered.

"He nodded his head gravely. 'Always!' he said. 'Yes, always. Straight to me! Death can't keep you away, can it? You're like a flame—Mary.'

" 'Hush!' I said, 'Hush! Here's some brandy. It isn't Mary, it's Philipse. Who did you think it was, your wife?'

"He didn't answer me. He leaned against the tree and drank a little of the spirits. Finally he opened his eyes again. His voice had become more rational. 'I can't see you very well, Philipse,' he said, 'but that's all right. The brandy's helping a lot. Show me the way, and I'll make it home. I'm not frozen, although I think my left hand is. Could you rub some snow on it? I'm lost, that's what I am. Darn near

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done for, too. Lost! I'm an ass, Philipse. Have you ever been lost?

"'Often!' I assured him. 'Come along. I won't try to build a fire now. Follow the sound of my skis.'

"We struck down out of the forest and on to the moonlit flat; slowly, Dowson was weak. But it was only two miles to his ranch. I thought it best to get him there as quickly as possible. Once I thought I heard him call out; but when I turned my head, he was following sturdily enough. On the flat we went along side by side without speaking. The night was changing to the long, ethereal, lucid hours that come before a frozen dawn. I thought untowardness was over. There was to be, however, just another twist to the screw.

"Suddenly Dowson stopped and gripped my arm. 'Mary's ahead, isn't she?' he asked. 'Yes, that's all right! I wondered what had become of her. It's no night for a woman to be out in, though. But she'd know right away if I was in trouble. Listen! Those are her skis, aren't they?'

"There was not a sound in that silent wilderness of snow, stretching from horizon to horizon, but a little whimpering of wind.

"Dowson's fingers tightened on my arm.

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'Philipse, you know, she frightened me when I first saw her standing there with you in that moonlight. Rather, I saw her first; I didn't see you till you gave me that brandy. I thought she was alone. I couldn't see very well, but her face was small and white and like a young girl's, and her eyes looked right into me. I guess she was scared, wasn't she? What an ass I am! What an ass! The whole thing!'

"I turned on him fiercely. 'For God's sake, Dowson,' I said, 'come along! There wasn't a—' And then I stopped. What was the use?

There was the strangest little chill running up and down my back, and stirring the hair under my helmet.

"We came down slowly over the benches to the river bottom and the ranch. A couple of Tulletson's men were just returning. They greeted us with relief. We pushed past them and arrived at the door of the main ranch-house. In the big room beyond, before a dying fire, sat Mrs. Dowson and her cousin, in big chairs opposite one another. Dowson swayed in the doorway, then caught himself, and leaned against the wall. For a moment the two women looked at him without speaking or moving. Their faces showed white and lined in the glow of the

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lamp. They had the air of those who had kept a vigil. Then Mrs. Dowson said coolly, and with that odd and brutal tactlessness that belongs to the tactful sex when wounded pride is close to breaking a heart. 'So you weren't lost? We slept here, Iris and I, before the fire.'

"Dowson swayed. His head sagged to his chest, and with a little cry Mrs. Dowson sprang from her chair, and crossed the room, and took him into her arms, and lowered him gently onto the divan, and held her arms about him while he was there. 'No, I didn't!' she sobbed. 'No, I didn't! I lied!—I didn't sleep, I prayed! They wouldn't let me go, but I went with them in my heart. I—I'm weak from it.'

"Dowson nodded his head gravely. 'I know you did,' he said from between his swollen lips. 'I know you did. I saw you. I was right, Philipse.' "

Philipse finishes his tale in the same aphoristic, slightly didactic manner in which he began it. "But after all," he says, "you couldn't help being a little sorry for Miss Darnell, could you? She was so still, and white, and altogether out of it. After all, she hadn't entirely made herself, had she?"

EXPERIMENT

WHEN she had reached that point of detachment where she could regard the matter more or less objectively, Mrs. Ennis, recalling memories of an interrupted but lifelong friendship, realized that Burnaby's behavior, outrageous or justifiable or whatever you choose to call it, at all events aberrational, was exactly what might have been expected of him, given an occasion when his instincts for liking or disliking had been sufficiently aroused. Moreover, there was about him always, she remembered, this additional exceptional quality: the rare and fortunate knowledge that socially he was independent; was not, that is, subject to retaliation. He led too roving a life to be moved by the threat of unpopularity; a grandfather had bequeathed him a small but unshakable inheritance.

As much, therefore, as any one can be in this world, he was a free agent; and the assurance of this makes a man very brave either for kindness or unkindness, and, of course, extremely dangerous either for good or evil. You will see,

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after a while, what I am driving at. Meanwhile, without further comment, we can come directly to Mrs. Ennis and to the night on which the incident occurred.

Mrs. Ennis, small and blond, and in a white evening gown of satin and silver sequins that made her look like a lovely and fashionable mermaid, sat in her drawing-room and stretched her feet out to the flames of a gentle wood-fire. It was seven o'clock of a late April night, and through an open window to her left came, from the little park beyond the house, a faint breeze that stirred lazily the curtains and brought to the jonquils, scattered about in numerous metal and crystal bowls, word of their brothers in the dusk without. The room was quiet, saving for the hissing of the logs; remote, delicately lighted, filled with the subtle odor of books and flowers; reminiscent of the suave personalities of those who frequented it. On the diminutive piano in one corner, a large silver frame, holding the photograph of a man in French uniform, caught here and there on its surface high lights from the shaded wall-lamp above. In the shelter of white book-cases, the backs of volumes in red and tawny and brown gave the effect of tapestry cunningly woven. Mrs. Ennis stared at the logs and smiled.

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It was an odd smile, reflective, yet anticipatory; amused, absent-minded, barely disturbing the lines of beautifully modeled red lips. Had any of Mrs. Ennis's enemies, and they were not few in number, seen it, they would have surmised mischief afoot; had any of her friends, and there were even more of these than enemies, been present, they would have been on the alert for events of interest. It all depended, you see, upon whether you considered a taste for amateur psychology, indulged in, a wickedness or not. Mrs. Ennis herself would not have given her favorite amusement so stately a name; she was merely aware that she found herself possessed of a great curiosity concerning people, particularly those of forcible and widely different characteristics, and that she liked, whenever possible, to gather them together, and then see what would happen. Usually something did—happen, that is.

With the innocence of a child playing with firecrackers (and it isn't altogether innocent, either), in her rôle of the god in the machine she had been responsible for many things; several comedies, perhaps a tragedy or two. Ordinarily her parties were dull enough; complacent Washington parties; diplomats, long-haired Senators from the West, short-bearded Senators from the

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East, sleek young men and women, all of whom sat about discussing grave nonsense concerning a country with which they had utterly lost touch, if ever they had had any; but every now and then, out of the incalculable shufflings of fate, appeared a combination that seemed to offer more excitement. To-night such a combination was at hand. Mrs. Ennis was very contented, therefore, in the manner of a blithe and beautiful spider.

Burnaby, undoubtedly, was the principal source of this contentment, for he was a young man—he wasn't really young, but you always thought of him as young—of infinite potentialities; Burnaby, just back from some esoteric work in Rumania, whither he had gone after the War, and in Washington for the night and greatly pleased to accept an invitation for dinner. But essential as he was, Burnaby was only part of the tableau arranged. To meet him, Mrs. Ennis had asked her best, for the time being, friend, Mimi de Rochefort—Mary was her right name—and Mimi de Rochefort's best, for the time being, friend, Robert Pollen. Nowadays Pollen came when Madame de Rochefort came; one expected his presence. He had been a habit in this respect for over six months; in fact, almost from the

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time Madame de Rochefort (she was so young that to call her Madame seemed absurdly quaint), married these five years to a Frenchman, had set foot once more upon her native land.

In the meeting of Pollen and Burnaby and Mary Rochefort, Mrs. Ennis foresaw contingencies; just what these contingencies were likely to be she did not know, but that an excellent chance for them existed she had no doubt, even if in the end they proved to be no more than the humor to be extracted from the reflection that a supposedly rational divinity had spent his time creating three people so utterly unlike.

The gilt clock on the mantelpiece struck half past seven, and chimed once, prettily. The jonquils on the piano shone like yellow water-lilies in a pool. Into the silence of the room penetrated, on noiseless feet, a fresh-colored man servant. Despite such days as the present, Mrs. Ennis had a way, irritating to her acquaintances, of obtaining faithful attendance. Even servants seemed to be glad to wait upon her. Her husband, dead these six years, had been unfailingly precise in all matters save the one of fiery drink.

"Mr. Burnaby!" announced the man servant.

Burnaby strode close on his heels. Mrs. Ennis had arisen and was standing with her back to the

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fireplace. She had the impression that a current of air had followed the entrance of the two men. She remembered now that that had always been the way with Burnaby; she had always felt as if he were bringing news of pine-forests and big empty countries she had never seen but could dimly imagine. It was very exciting.

Burnaby paused and looked about the room doubtfully, then he chuckled and came forward. "I haven't seen anything like this for three years," he said. "Rumanian palaces are furnished in the very latest bad taste."

He took Mrs. Ennis's outstretched hand and peered down at her with narrowed eyelids. She received a further impression, an impression she had almost forgotten in the intervening years, of height and leanness, of dark eyes, and dark, crisp hair; a vibrant impression; something like a chord of music struck sharply. Unconsciously she let her hand rest in his for a moment, then she drew it away hastily. He was smiling and talking to her.

"Rhoda! You ought to begin to look a bit older! You're thirty-six, if you're a day! How do you do it? You look like a wise and rather naughty little girl."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Ennis. "I wear my hair

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parted on one side like a *débutante* to give me a head-start on all the knowing and subtle and wicked people I have to put up with. While they are trying to break the ice with an *ingénue*, I'm sizing them up."

Burnaby laughed. "Well, I'm not subtle," he said. He sank down into a big chair across the fireplace from her. "I'm only awfully glad to be back; and I'm good and simple and amenable, and willing to do nearly anything any good American tells me to do. I love Americans."

"You won't for very long," Mrs. Ennis assured him dryly. "Particularly if you stay in Washington more than a day." She was wondering how even for a moment she had been able to forget Burnaby's vividness.

"No," laughed Burnaby, "I suppose not. But while the mood is on me, don't disillusion me."

Mrs. Ennis looked across at him with a smile. "You'll meet two very attractive people to-night, anyway," she said.

"Oh, yes!" He leaned forward. "I had forgotten—who are they?"

Mrs. Ennis spread her arms out along the chair. "There's Mary Rochefort," she answered, "and there's Robert Pollen, who's supposed to be the most alluring man alive."

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"Is it doing him any good?"

"Well—" Mrs. Ennis looked up with a laugh.

"You don't like him? Or perhaps you do?"

Mrs. Ennis knit her brows in thought, her blue eyes dark with conjecture. "I don't know," she said at length. "Sometimes I think I do, and sometimes I think I don't. He's very good-looking in a tall, blond, pliable way, and he can be very amusing when he wants to be. I don't know."

"Why not?"

Mrs. Ennis wrinkled her nose in the manner of one who is pushed to explanation.

"I am not so sure," she confided, "that I admire professional philanderers as much as I did. Although, so long as they leave me alone—"

"Oh, he's that, is he?"

Mrs. Ennis corrected herself hastily. "Oh, no," she protested. "I shouldn't talk that way, should I? Now you'll have an initial prejudice, and that isn't fair—only—" she hesitated— "I rather wish he would confine his talents to his own equals and not conjure young married women at their most vulnerable period."

"Which is?"

"Just when," said Mrs. Ennis, "they're not sure whether they want to fall in love again with

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their own husbands or not." She stopped abruptly. She was surprised that she had told Burnaby these things; even more surprised at the growing incisiveness of her voice. She was not accustomed to taking the amatory excursions of her friends too much to heart; she had a theory that it was none of her business, that perhaps some day she might want charity herself. But now she found herself perceptibly indignant. She wondered if it wasn't Burnaby's presence that was making her so. Sitting across from her, he made her think of directness and dependability and other traits she was accustomed to refer to as "primitive virtues." She liked his black, heavily ribbed evening stockings. Somehow they were like him. It made her angry with herself and with Burnaby that she should feel this way; be so moved by "primitive virtues." She detested puritanism greatly, and righteously, but so much so that she frequently mistook the most innocent fastidiousness for an unforgivable rigidity. "If they once do," she concluded, "once do fall in love with their husbands again, they're safe, you know, for all time."

She looked up and drew in her breath sharply. Burnaby was sitting forward in his chair, staring at her with the curious, far-sighted stare she

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remembered was characteristic of him when his interest was suddenly and thoroughly aroused. It was as if he were looking through the person to whom he was talking to some horizon beyond. It was a trifle uncanny, unless you were accustomed to the trick.

"What's the matter?" she asked. She had the feeling that back of her some one she could not see was standing.

Burnaby smiled. "Nothing," he said. He sank back into his chair. "That's an odd name—the name of this alluring fellow of yours, isn't it? What did you say it was—Pollen?"

"Yes. Robert Pollen. Why? Do you know him?"

"No." Burnaby shook his head. He leaned over and lit a cigarette. "You don't mind, do you?" he asked. He raised his eyes. "So he's conjuring this Madame de Rochefort, is he?"

Mrs. Ennis flushed. "I never said anything of the kind!" she protested. "It's none of our business, anyway."

Burnaby smiled calmly. "I quite agree with you," he said. "I imagine that a Frenchwoman, married for a while, is much better able to conduct her life in this respect than even the most experienced of us."

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"She isn't French," said Mrs. Ennis; "she's American. And she's only been married five years. She's just a child—twenty-six."

"Oh!" ejaculated Burnaby. "One of those hard-faced children! I understand—Newport, Palm Beach—"

His voice was cut across by Mrs. Ennis's indignant retort. "You don't in the least!" she said. "She's not one of those hard-faced children; she's lovely—and I've come to the conclusion that she's pathetic. I'm beginning to rather hate this man Pollen. Back of it all are subtleties of personality difficult to fathom. You should know Blais Rochefort. I imagine a woman going about things the wrong way could break her heart on him like waves on a crystal rock. I think it has been a question of fire meeting crystal, and when it finds that the crystal is difficult to warm, turning back upon itself. I said waves, didn't I? Well, I don't care if my metaphors are mixed. It's tragic, anyhow. And the principal tragedy is that Blais Rochefort isn't really cold—at least, I don't think he would be if properly approached—he is merely beautifully lucid and intelligent and exacting in a way no American understands, least of all a petted girl who has no family and who is very rich.

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He expects, you see, an equal lucidity from his wife. He's not to be won over by the fumbling and rather selfish and pretty little tricks that are all most of us know. But Mary, I think, would have learned if she had only held on. Now, I'm afraid, she's losing heart. Hard-faced child!" Mrs. Ennis grew indignant again. "Be careful, my friend; even you might find her dangerously pathetic."

Burnaby's eyes were placidly amused. "Thanks," he observed. "You've told me all I wanted to know."

Mrs. Ennis waved toward the piano. "There's Blais Rochefort's photograph," she retorted in tones of good-humored exasperation. "Go over and look at it."

"I will."

Burnaby's black shoulders, bent above the photograph, were for a moment the object of a pensive regard. Mrs. Ennis sighed. "Your presence makes me puritanical," she observed. "I have always felt that the best way for any one to get over Pollens was to go through with them and forget them."

Burnaby spoke without turning his head.

"He's good-looking."

"Very."

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"A real man."

"Decidedly! Very brave and very cultivated."

"He waxes his mustache."

"Yes, even brave men do that occasionally."

"I should think," said Burnaby thoughtfully, putting the photograph down, "that he might be worth a woman's hanging on to."

Mrs. Ennis got up, crossed over to the piano, and leaned an elbow upon it, resting her cheek in the palm of her upturned hand and smiling at Burnaby.

"Don't let's be so serious," she said. "What business is it of ours?" She turned her head away and began to play with the petals of a near-by jonquil. "Spring's a restless time, isn't it?"

It seemed to her that the most curious little silence followed this speech of hers, and yet she knew that in actual time it was nothing, and felt that it existed probably only in her own heart. She heard the clock on the mantelpiece across the room ticking; far off, the rattle of a taxicab. The air coming through the open window bore the damp, stirring smell of early grass.

"Madame de Rochefort and Mr. Pollen!" announced a voice.

Mrs. Ennis had once said that her young friend, Mimi de Rochefort, responded to night

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more brilliantly than almost any other woman she knew. The description was apt. Possibly by day there was a pallor too lifeless, a nose a trifle too short and arrogant, lips, possibly, too full; but by night these discrepancies blended into something very near perfection, and back of them as well was a delicate illumination as of lanterns hung in trees beneath stars; an illumination due to youth, and to very large dark eyes, and to dark, soft hair and red lips. Nor with this beauty went any of the coolness or abrupt languor with which the modern young hide their eagerness.

Mary Rochefort was quite simple beneath her habitual reserve; frank and appealing and even humorous at times, as if startled out of her usual mood of reflective quiet by some bit of wit, slowly apprehended, too good to be overlooked. Mrs. Ennis watched with a sidelong glance the effect of her entrance upon Burnaby. Madame de Rochefort! How absurd! To call this white, tall, slim child madame! She admired rather enviously the gown of shimmering dark blue, the impeccability of adolescence. Over the girl's white shoulder, too much displayed, Pollen peered at Burnaby with the vague, hostile smile of the guest, not yet introduced, to a guest of similar sex.

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"Late as usual!" he announced. "Mimi kept me!" His manner was subtly domestic.

"You're really on the stroke of the clock," said Mrs. Ennis. "Madame de Rochefort—Mr. Burnaby—Mr. Pollen." She laughed abruptly, as if a thought had just occurred to her. "Mr. Burnaby," she explained to the girl, "is the last surviving specimen of the American male—he has all the ancient national virtues. Preserved, I suppose, because he spends most of his time in Alaska, or wherever it is. I particularly wanted you to meet him."

Burnaby flushed and laughed uncertainly. "I object—" he began.

The fresh-colored man servant entered with a tray of cocktails. Madame de Rochefort exclaimed delightedly. "I'm so glad," she said. "Nowadays one fatigues oneself before dinner by wondering whether there will be anything to drink or not. How absurd! What a childish antic Prohibition is!" The careful choice of words, the precision of the young worldly voice were in amusing contrast to the youthfulness of appearance. Standing before the fireplace in her blue gown, she resembled a tapering lily growing from the indigo shadows of a noon orchard.

"Rhoda'll have cocktails when there aren't any

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more left in the country," said Pollen. "Trust Rhoda!"

Mary Rochefort laughed. "I always do," she said, "with reservations." She turned to Burnaby. "Where are you just back from?" she asked. "I understand you are always just back from some place, or on the verge of going."

"Usually on the verge," answered Burnaby. He looked at her deliberately, a smile in his dark eyes; then he looked at Pollen.

"The War?"

"Yes—by way of Rumania in the end."

"The War!" Mary Rochefort's lips became petulant. One noticed for the first time the possibility of considerable petulance back of the shining self-control. "How sick of it I grew—all of us living over there! I'd like to sleep for a thousand years in a field filled with daffodils."

The fresh-colored man servant announced dinner. "Shall we go down?" said Mrs. Ennis.

They left the little drawing-room with its jonquils and warm shadows, and went along a short hall, and then down three steps and across a landing to the dining-room beyond. It, like the drawing-room, was small, white-paneled to the ceiling, with a few rich prints of Constable landscapes on the walls, and velvet-dark sideboards

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and tables that caught the light of the candles. In the center was a table of snowy drapery and silver and red roses.

Mrs. Ennis sank into her chair and looked about her with content. She loved small dinners beautifully thought out, and even more she loved them when, as on this night, they were composed of people who interested her. She stole a glance at Burnaby. How clean and brown and alert he was! The white table-cloth accentuated his look of fitness and muscular control. What an amusing contrast he presented to the languid gesturing Pollen, who sat opposite him! And yet Pollen was considerable of a man in his own way; very conquering in the affairs of life; immensely clever in his profession of architecture. Famous, Mrs. Ennis had heard.

But Mrs. Ennis, despite her feminine approval of success, couldn't imagine herself being as much interested in him—dangerously interested—as she knew her friend Mary Rochefort to be. How odd from all the world to pick out a tall, blond, willowy man like Pollen! On the verge of middle-age, too! Perhaps it was this very willowness, this apparent placidity that made him attractive. This child, Mary Rochefort, quite alone in the world, largely untrained, adrift,

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imperiously demanding from an imperious husband something to which she had not as yet found the key, might very naturally gravitate toward any one presenting Pollen's appearance of security; his attitude of complacency in the face of feminine authority. But was he complacent? Mrs. Ennis had her doubts. He was very vain; underneath his urbaneness there might be an elastic hardness. There were, moreover, at times indications of a rather contemptuous attitude toward a world less highly trained than himself. She turned to Pollen, trying to recollect what for the last few moments he had been saying to her. He perceived her more scrutinizing attention and faced toward her. From under lowered eyelids he had been watching with a moody furtiveness Mary Rochefort and Burnaby, oblivious in the manner of people who are glad to have met.

Mrs. Ennis found herself annoyed, her sense of good manners shocked. She had not imagined that Pollen could be guilty of such clumsiness; she questioned if matters had reached a point where such an attitude on his part would be justifiable under any circumstances. At all events, her doubts concerning his complacency had been answered. It occurred to Mrs. Ennis that her dinner-party was composed of more inflammable

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material, presented more dramatic possibilities, than even she had suspected. She embraced Polen with her smile.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" she asked.

He lifted long eyebrows and smiled faintly.

"Working very hard," he said.

"Building behemoths for billionaires?"

"Yes."

"And the rest of the time?"

"Rather drearily going about."

She surveyed him with wicked innocence.

"Why don't you fall in love?" she suggested.

His expression remained unmoved. "It is so difficult," he retorted, "to find the proper subject. A man of my experience frightens the inexperienced; the experienced frighten me."

"You mean—?"

"That I have reached the age where the innocence no longer possible to me seems the only thing worth while."

Mrs. Ennis wrinkled her nose daintily. "Nonsense!" she observed, and helped herself to the dish the servant was holding out to her. "What you have said," she resumed, "is the last word of the sentimentalist. If I thought you really meant

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it, I would know at once that you were very cold and very cruel and rather silly."

"Thanks!"

"Oh, I'm talking more or less abstractly."

"Well, possibly I am all of those things."

"But you want me to be personal?"

Pollen laughed. "Of course! Doesn't everybody want *you* to be personal?"

For an instant Mrs. Ennis looked again at Burnaby and Mary Rochefort, and a slightly rueful smile stirred in her eyes. It was amusing that she, who detested large dinners, and adored general conversation, should at the moment be so engrossed in preventing the very type of conversation she preferred. She returned to Pollen. What a horrid man he really was! Unangled and amorphous, and underneath, cold! He had a way of framing the woman to whom he was talking and then stepping back out of the picture. One felt like a model in all manner of dress and undress. She laughed softly. "Don't," she begged, "be so mysterious about yourself! Tell me—" she held him with her eyes of ingratiating sapphire—"I've always been interested in finding out just what you are, anyway."

Far back in Pollen's own eyes of golden brown a little spark slowly burst into flame. It was

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exactly as if a gnome had lighted a lantern at the back of an unknown cave. Mrs. Ennis inwardly shuddered, but outwardly was gay.

How interminably men talked when once they were launched upon that favorite topic, themselves! Pollen showed every indication of reaching a point of intellectual intoxication where his voice would become antiphonal. His objective self was taking turns in standing off and admiring his subjective self. Mrs. Ennis wondered at her own kindness of heart. Why did she permit herself to suffer so for her friends; in the present instance, a friend who would probably—rather the contrary—by no means thank her for her pains? She wanted to talk to Burnaby. She was missing most of his visit. She wanted to talk to Burnaby so greatly that the thought made her cheeks burn faintly. She began to hate Pollen. Mary Rochefort's cool young voice broke the spell.

"You told me," she said accusingly, "that this man—this Mr. Burnaby, has all the primitive virtues; he is the wickedest man I have ever met."

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Ennis.

"The very wickedest!"

Pollen's mouth twisted under his mustache.

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"I wouldn't have suspected it," he observed, surveying Burnaby with ironic amusement. There was just a hint of condescension in his voice.

Burnaby's eyes drifted past him with a look of quiet speculation in their depths, before he smiled at Mrs. Ennis.

"Rumania has changed you," she exclaimed.

He chuckled. "Not in the least! I was simply trying to prove to Madame de Rochefort that hot-bloodedness, coolly conceived, is the only possible road to success. Like most innately moral people, she believes just the opposite—in cool-bloodedness, hotly conceived."

"I moral?" said Mary Rochefort, as if the thought had never occurred to her before.

"Why, of course," said Burnaby. "It's a question of attitude, not of actual performance. The most moral man I ever knew was an habitual drunkard. His life was spent between debauch and disgust."

"Tell us what you meant in the first place," commanded Mrs. Ennis.

"Something," said Burnaby slowly, "totally un-American—in short, whole-heartedness." He clasped his sinewy, brown hands on the tablecloth. "I mean," he continued, "if, after due

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thought—never forget the due thought—you believe it to be the best thing to do to elope with another man's wife, elope; only don't look back. In the same way, if you decide to become, after much question, an ironmonger, be an ironmonger. Love passionately what you've chosen. In other words, life's like fox-hunting; choose your line, choose it slowly and carefully, then follow it 'hell-for-leather.'

"You see, the trouble with Americans is that they are the greatest wanters of cake after they've eaten it the world has ever seen. Our blood isn't half as mixed as our point of view. We want to be good and we want to be bad; we want to be a dozen utterly incompatible things all at the same time. Of course, all human beings are that way, but other human beings make their choices and then try to eradicate the incompatibilities. The only whole-hearted people we possess are our business men, and even they, once they succeed, usually spoil the picture by astounding open scandals with chorus-girls."

Mrs. Ennis shook her head with amused bewilderment. "Do you mean," she asked, "that a man or woman can have only one thing in his or her life?"

"Only one very outwardly important thing—

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publicly," retorted Burnaby. "You may be a very great banker with a very great background as a husband, but you can't be a very great banker and at the same time what is known as a 'very great lover.' In Europe, where they arrange their lives better, one chooses either banking or 'loving.'" He smiled with frank good-humor at Pollen; the first time, Mrs. Ennis reflected, he had done so that night. A suspicion that Burnaby was not altogether ingenuous crossed her mind. But why wasn't he? "You're a man, Pollen," he said; "tell them it's true."

Pollen, absorbed apparently in thoughts of his own, stammered slightly. "Why—why, yes," he agreed hastily.

Mrs. Ennis sighed ruefully and looked at Burnaby with large, humorously reproachful eyes. "You have changed," she observed, "or else you're not saying but half of what you really think—and part of it you don't think at all."

"Oh, yes," laughed Burnaby, "you misunderstand me." He picked up a fork and tapped the table-cloth with it thoughtfully; then he raised his head. "I was thinking of a story I might tell you," he said, "but on second thoughts I don't think I will."

"Don't be foolish!" admonished Mrs. Ennis.

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"Your stories are always interesting. First finish your dessert."

Pollen smiled languidly. "Yes," he commented, "go on. It's interesting, decidedly. I thought people had given up this sort of conversation long ago."

For the third time Burnaby turned slowly toward him, only now his eyes, instead of resting upon the bland countenance for a fraction of a second, surveyed it lingeringly with the detached, absent-minded stare Mrs. Ennis remembered so well. "Perhaps I will tell it, after all," he said, in the manner of a man who has definitely changed his mind. "Would you like to hear it?" he asked, turning to Mary Rochefort.

"Certainly!" she laughed. "Is it very immoral?"

"Extremely," vouchsafed Burnaby, "from the accepted point of view."

"Tell it in the other room," suggested Mrs. Ennis. "We'll sit before the fire and tell ghost-stories."

There was a trace of grimness in Burnaby's answering smile. "Curiously enough, it is a ghost-story," he said.

They had arisen to their feet; above the candles their heads and shoulders were indistinct.

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For a moment Mrs. Ennis hesitated and looked at Burnaby with a new bewilderment in her eyes.

"If it's very immoral," interposed Pollen, "I'm certain to like it."

Burnaby bowed to him with a curious old-fashioned courtesy. "I am sure," he observed, "it will interest you immensely."

Mrs. Ennis suddenly stared through the soft obscurity. "Good gracious," she said to herself, "what is he up to?"

In the little drawing-room to which they returned, the jonquils seemed to have received fresh vigor from their hour of loneliness; their shining gold possessed the shadows. Mary Rochefort paused by the open window and peered into the perfumed night. "How ridiculously young the world gets every Spring!" she said.

Mrs. Ennis arranged herself before the fire. "Now," she said to Burnaby, "you sit directly opposite. And you—" she indicated Pollen—"sit here. And Mimi, you there. So!" She nodded to Burnaby. "Begin!"

He laughed deprecatingly. "You make it very portentous," he objected. "It isn't much of a story; it's—it's really only a parable."

"It's going to be a moral story, after all," interjected Mrs. Ennis triumphantly.

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Burnaby chuckled and puffed at his cigarette. "Well," he said finally, "it's about a fellow named Mackintosh."

Pollen, drowsily smoking a cigar, suddenly stirred uneasily.

"Who?" he asked, leaning forward.

"Mackintosh—James Mackintosh! What are you looking for? An ash-tray? Here's one." Burnaby passed it over.

"Thanks!" said Pollen, relaxing. "Yes—go on!"

Burnaby resumed his narrative calmly. "I knew him—Mackintosh, that is—fifteen, no, it was fourteen years ago in Arizona, when I was ranching there, and for the next three years I saw him constantly. He had a place ten miles down the river from me. He was about four years older than I was—a tall, slim, sandy-haired, freckled fellow, preternaturally quiet; a trusty, if there ever was one. Unlike most preternaturally quiet people; however, it wasn't dulness that made him that way; he wasn't dull a bit. Stir him up on anything and you found that he had thought about it a lot. But he never told me anything about himself until I had known him almost two years, and then it came out quite accidentally one night—we were on a Spring

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round-up—when the two of us were sitting up by the fire, smoking and staring at the desert stars. All the rest were asleep.” Burnaby paused. “Is this boring you?” he asked.

“Oh, no!” said Mrs. Ennis; she was watching intently Pollen’s half-averted face.

Burnaby threw away his cigarette. “At first,” he said, “it seemed to me like the most ordinary of stories—the usual fixed idea that the rejected lover carries around with him for a year or so until he forgets it; the idea that the girl will regret her choice and one day kick over the traces and hunt him up.

“But it wasn’t the ordinary story—not by a long shot. You’ll see. It seems he had fallen in love with a girl—had been in love with her for years—before he had left the East; a very young girl, nineteen, and of an aspiring family. The family, naturally, didn’t look upon him with any favor whatsoever; he was poor and he didn’t show the slightest inclination to engage in any of the pursuits they considered proper to the ambitions of a worthy young man. Rather a dreamer, I imagine, until he had found the thing he wanted to do. Not a very impressive figure in the eyes of white-spatted fatherhood. More-

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over, he himself was shy about trying to marry a rich girl while she was still so young.

“‘She was brought up all wrong,’ he said. ‘What could you expect? Life will have to teach her. She will have to get over her idea that money and houses and possessions are the main things, as one gets over the measles.’ But he knew she would get over it; he was sure that at the bottom of her heart was a well of honesty and directness. ‘Some day,’ he said, ‘she’ll be out here.’”

“Apparently the upshot of the matter was that he went to the girl and told her—all these ideas of his; quit, came West; left the road open to the other man. Oh, yes, there was another man, of course; one thoroughly approved of by the family. Quaint, wasn’t it? Perhaps a little overly judicial. But then that was his way. Slow-moving and sure. He saw the girl at dusk in the garden of her family’s country place; near a sun-dial, or some other appropriately romantic spot. She kissed him nobly on the forehead, I suppose—the young girl gesture; and told him she wasn’t worthy of him and to forget her.

“‘Oh, no, I won’t,’ he said. ‘Not for a minute! And in five years—or ten—you’ll come to me. You’ll find out.’ And then, he added something

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else: 'Whenever things have reached their limit,' he said, 'think of me with all your might. Think hard! There's something in that sort of stuff, you know, where two people love each other. Think hard!' Then he went away."

A log snapped and fell with a soft thud onto the ashes beneath. Burnaby was silent for a moment, staring at the fire.

When he spoke again, it was with a slow precision as if he were trying with extreme care to find the right words.

"You see," he said, "he had as an added foundation for his faith—perhaps as the main foundation for it—his knowledge of the other man's character; the character of the man the girl married. It was—" he spoke more hastily and, suddenly raising his head, looked at Mary Rochefort, who, sunk back in her chair, was gazing straight ahead of her—"an especial kind of character. I must dwell on it for a moment, and you must mark well what I say, for on it my parable largely depends. It was a character of the sort that to any but an odalisk means eventual shame; to any woman of pride, you understand, eventually of necessity a broken heart. It was a queer character, but not uncommon. Outwardly very attractive. Mackintosh described it suc-

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cinctly, shortly, as we sat there by the fire. He spoke between his teeth—the faint wind stirring the desert sand sounded rather like his voice.” Burnaby paused again and reached over for a cigarette and lit it deliberately.

In the silence Mary Rochefort spoke with unexpected acerbity to Pollen. “Why do you wriggle so?” she asked. “You make me nervous.”

Burnaby continued. “He was a man,” he said, “who apparently had the faculty of making most women love him and, in the end, the faculty of making most women hate him. I imagine to have known him very well would have been to leave one with a mental shudder such as follows the touching of anguilliform material; snake-like texture. It would leave one ashamed and broken, for fundamentally he was contemptuous of the dignity of personality, particularly of the personalities of women. He was a collector, you understand, a collector of beauty, and women, and incidents—amorous incidents. He carried into his personal relationships the cold objectiveness of the artist. But he wasn’t a very great artist, or he wouldn’t have done so; he would have had the discrimination to control the artist’s greatest peril. It’s a flame, this cold objectiveness, but a flame so powerful that it must be

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properly shaded for intimate use. Otherwise it kills like violet rays. Women wore out their hearts on him, not like waves breaking on a crystal rock, but like rain breaking into a gutter."

"Good Lord!" murmured Mrs. Ennis involuntarily.

Burnaby caught her exclamation. "Bad, wasn't it?" he smiled. "But remember I am only repeating what Mackintosh told me. Well, there he was then—Mackintosh—hard at work all day trying to build himself up a ranch, and he was succeeding, too, and, at night, sitting on his porch, smoking and listening to the river, and apparently expecting every moment the girl to appear. It was rather eerie. He had such a convincing way; he was himself so convinced. You half expected yourself to see her come around the corner of the log-house in the moonlight. There was about it all the impression that here was something that had a touch of the inevitability of the Greek idea of fate; something more arranged than the usual course of human events. Meanwhile, back in the East, was the girl, learning a little about life."

He interrupted himself. "Want a cigarette?" he said to Pollen. "Here they are." He handed over the box.

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"In four years she had learned a lot," he said; "she had become apparently almost a woman. On a certain hot evening in July—about seven o'clock, I imagine—she became one entirely; at least, for the moment, and, at least, her sort of woman. I am not defending what she did, remember; I am simply saying that she did it.

"It was very hot; even now when dusk was approaching. She had been feeling rather ill all day; feverish. She had not been able to get away to her country place as yet. Into the semidarkness of the room where she was came her husband. That night she had determined, as women will, upon a final test. She knew where he expected to dine; she asked him if he would dine with her.

"'I can't,' he said. 'I'm sorry—'

"Possibly nothing immediate would have happened had he not added an unspeakable flourish to his falsehood. He reached out his arms and drew the girl to him and tried to kiss her condescendingly; but I suppose his hands found her, in her clinging gown, soft to their touch. At all events, they tightened upon her in an unmistakable way. She pushed him back. 'Let me pass!' she said. 'You—you—!'—she could think of no words to suit him. You see, she understood

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him completely now. He was a collector, but a collector so despicable that he was even unwilling to trade one article for another. He wanted to keep on his shelves all the accumulation of a lifetime, and take down from time to time whatever part of it suited his sudden fancy.

"The girl went up to her own room, and very carefully, not knowing precisely what she did, changed into a black street dress and removed all marks of identification. Her eyes swam with feverishness. While she was dressing, she bathed in hot water her arms where her husband's hands had been. She concluded that it was not what he had done—had constantly done—but what he was that made life unbearable. When she was through she went downstairs, and out of the front door, and walked slowly toward the center of the town and the railway station."

"And is that all," asked Mary Rochefort, after a while.

"Oh, no," said Burnaby; "it's only the beginning. Mackintosh was in the hills beyond his ranch, hunting horses. He was camped in a little valley by himself. On this particular day he had been out since sun-up and did not get back until just about dusk. He picketed the horse he had been riding, and built a small fire, and began to

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cook his supper. All around him, brooding and unreal, was the light you get in high mountain-places. The fire shone like a tiny ruby set in topaz. Mackintosh raised his head and saw a woman coming out of the spur of aspen-trees across the creek from him. He wasn't surprised; he knew right away who it was; he knew it was the girl. He watched her for a moment, and then he went over to her, and took her hand, and led her to the fire. They didn't speak at all."

"And you mean," asked Mrs. Ennis, "that she did that? That she came all the way out to him, like that?"

"No," retorted Burnaby, "of course not. How could she? She wasn't even sure where he was living. At the moment she was in a hospital out of her head. You see, I didn't know whether to believe Mackintosh or not when he said he saw her that night, although I am sure he believed he did—such things are beyond human proof—but what I do know is that he came straight down from the hills, and boarded a train, and went East, and found the girl, and after a while, came back with her." He looked at the fire. "They were the most completely happy people I have ever seen," he continued. "They were so calm and determined about themselves. Everything

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immaterial had been burned away. They knew they were playing on the side of fate. And so," he concluded, "that's the end of my parable. What do you make of it?"

The curtains, stirred by the breeze, tip-tapped softly; in the silence the fire hissed gently. Pollen spoke first, but with some difficulty, as if in the long period of listening his throat had become dry. "It's very interesting," he said; "very! But what's it all about? And you certainly don't believe it, do you?"

"Of course I do," answered Burnaby calmly. "You should, too; it's true."

Mary Rochefort looked up with an exclamation. "Gracious!" she said. "I had no idea it was so late! My motor must be waiting." She got to her feet. She was very white and her eyes were tired; the translucent quality of the earlier hours was gone. "I'm worn out," she explained. "I've been going about too much. I must rest." She held her hand out to Mrs. Ennis; over her shoulder she spoke to Pollen. "No," she said, "Don't bother. I'll take myself home, thanks."

"I'll see you to your car," he stammered.

She turned to Burnaby. "Good night!" she

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said. Her voice was lifeless, disinterested; her eyes met his for an instant and were withdrawn.

"Good night," he said.

Mrs. Ennis stood by the door for a moment before she walked slowly back to the fireplace. From the street outside came the whirring of a motor and the sound of Mary Rochefort's voice saying good-by to Pollen.

Mrs. Ennis rested an arm on the mantelpiece and kicked a log thoughtfully with a white-slippered foot; then she faced about on Burnaby.

"I suppose," she said, "you realize that you have spoiled my party?"

"I?" said Burnaby.

"Yes, you!" Her small, charming face was a study in ruefulness, in indecision whether to be angry or not, and, one might almost have imagined, a certain amused tenderness as well. "Don't you suppose those people knew to whom you were talking?"

Burnaby, peering down at her, narrowed his eyes and then opened them very wide. "They couldn't very well have helped it," he said, "could they? For, you see"—he paused—"the girl who came West was Mrs. Pollen."

Mrs. Ennis gasped in the manner of a person who is hearing too much. "Mrs. Pollen?"

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"Yes. You knew he had been divorced, didn't you? Years ago."

"I'd heard it, but forgotten." Mrs. Ennis closed her jeweled hand. "And you dared," she demanded, "to tell his story before him in that way?"

"Why not? It was rather a complete revenge upon him of fate, wasn't it? You see, he couldn't very well give himself away, could he? His one chance was to keep quiet." Burnaby paused and smiled doubtfully at Mrs. Ennis. "I hope I made his character clear enough," he said. "That, after all, was the point of the story."

"How did you know it was this Pollen?" she asked, "and how, anyway, would Mary Rochefort know of whom you were talking?"

Burnaby grinned. "I took a chance," he said. "And as to the second, I told Madame de Rochefort at dinner—merely as a coincidence; at least, I let her think so—that I had once known in the West a Mrs. Pollen with a curious history. Perhaps I wouldn't have told it if Pollen hadn't been so witty." He picked up a silver dish from the mantelpiece and examined it carefully. "One oughtn't to have such a curious name if one is going to lead such a curious life, ought one?" he asked. He sighed. "You're right," he con-

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cluded; "your friend Mary Rochefort is a child."

Mrs. Ennis looked up at him with searching eyes.

"Why don't you stay longer in Washington?" she asked softly. "Just now, of course, Mary Rochefort hates you; but she won't for long—I think she was beginning to have doubts about Pollen, anyway."

Burnaby suddenly looked grave and disconcerted. "Oh, no!" he said hastily. "Oh, no! I must be off to-morrow." He laughed. "My dear Rhoda," he said, "you have the quaintest ideas. I don't like philandering; I'm afraid I have a crude habit of falling really in love."

Mrs. Ennis's own eyes were veiled. "If you're going away so soon, sit down," she said, "and stay. You needn't go—oh, for hours!"

"I must," he answered. "I'm off so early."

She sighed. "For years?"

"One—perhaps two." His voice became gay and bantering again. "My dear Rhoda," he said, "I'm extremely sorry if I really spoiled your party, but I don't believe I did—not altogether, that is. Underneath, I think you enjoyed it." He took her small hand in his; he wondered why it was so cold and listless.

At the door leading into the hall he paused

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and looked back. "Oh," he said, "there was one thing I forgot to tell you! You see, part of my story wasn't altogether true. Mrs. Pollen—or rather, Mrs. Mackintosh—left Mackintosh after five years or so. She's in the movies—doing very well, I understand. She would; wouldn't she? Of course, she was no good to begin with. But that didn't spoil the point of my story, did it? Good-by, Rhoda, my dear." He was gone.

Mrs. Ennis did not move until she heard the street-door close; she waited even a little longer, following the sound of Burnaby's footsteps as they died away into the night; finally she walked over to the piano, and, sitting down, raised her hands as if to strike the keys. Instead, she suddenly put both her arms on the little shelf before the music-rack and buried her head in them. The curtains tip-tapped on the window-frames; the room was entirely still.

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VON BOEHN has twisted himself in and out of my life considerably, or rather, I have twisted him in and out of it, for I doubt if by now he remembers ever having met me. He wouldn't; he was a Prussian aristocrat, and I at best merely an American who at one time had, from his point of view, the good fortune of meeting him and the further extreme honor of knowing him for awhile with some degree of intimacy.

It wasn't because I liked Von Boehn, you understand, that for a year or two I saw him frequently; I didn't like him, even then, although I was young and counts possessed a glamor, particularly a count who appeared in all the picturesqueness of an uhlan uniform, and although in himself Von Boehn owned a certain blond impeccable charm. He was very good-looking; slim, clear-cut, rosy checked, blue-eyed. You would find it difficult to describe the dash and smartness of him in his tight fitting breeches and his yellow-breasted jacket and his polished tschapka, with its sweeping plumes, cocked over

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an ear. You thought him a beautiful boy until you examined him closely, and then you saw that he wasn't a boy at all; at least, his eyes weren't boyish. They were pale and cold, cold as the sea that washed his Junker estate in Pomerania, and they were opaque. Behind them nothing was to be seen. To this opaqueness he added at the time by wearing a monocle; one of those stringless German monocles that are never removed and eventually make a red mark above the cheek bone and below the eyebrow—a little round glittering mirror of insolence. I had thought the English of a certain class held the world's record for a deliberate obliteration of expression, but Von Boehn went them one better, and in his case, I believe, it was no conscious effort to conceal a racial shyness, or to bolster a rather shaky patrician sangfroid, but because there was nothing to express; nothing, that is, except a series of rules, so ingrained, the result of so many generations, so meticulous, covering so thoroughly the smallest details of life, that they required not the slightest thought to put them into execution. Von Boehn was really a monster, when you come to consider it, for what distinguishes a human being from a machine is self-determination, and you can't be very self-determinate when every-

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thing you do is the result not of reason but of tradition.

No, I would not have seen much of Von Boehn, both because of my own inclinations and because he, on his part, would not have bothered his head about me, had it not have been for Von Arnault, who was in the same regiment as Boehn, and for Von Arnault's wife. The Arnaults were kindly and democratic and Saxon, and besides had the exquisite luck to be really of French blood. They had travelled greatly, visiting foreign relations; one even at times caught them showing signs of a sense of humor. In the small garrison and university town where I found myself they were an island in the greasy sea of students and bleak soldiery. Not altogether a green island perhaps, but at least one with firm sand. Their drawing-room was soft and prettily furnished, they avoided constant references to the superiority of Germany to the rest of the world, and they aired their rooms. Of course Von Boehn 'slept-English' also, for he was a very chic young man, but it wasn't an universal custom. One occasion I especially remember when the Arnaults' sense of humor rose to the delicate pitch of not appreciating to the full a supposedly funny story of their beloved Von Boehn.

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I shan't forget the story. It left a little scar on my mind. At the time I did not grasp its full import; in fact, I did not grasp its full import until about four and a half years ago. I was only twenty-four, you must remember, and, like most young men, a snob. But I didn't like the story; it affected me in the same way that long and dirty finger-nails would if they had suddenly been drawn down my naked back. I couldn't just tell the reason why. It was, of course, because I was an American, but hadn't as yet appreciated the shining fact. One isn't born to Americanism; one achieves it. It is a thing of the mind; the result of thought and experience. You grow up to it.

That Sunday Von Boehn was coming to dinner with the Arnaulds. It was November, and outside the day was gray and hinted of snow, and the air was full of the mysterious stirring smell of smoke and old buildings that, on days like these, hangs about an ancient city. You thought of huts in the middle of pine forests and of quaint gabled towns. That's the heart-rending thing about the Germans; they've cut off the heads of their own fairies. A poor sort of warfare. The Arnaulds' small dining-room was cosily warm, and the silver twinkled, and the few bewigged

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ancestral portraits they carried about with them looked down with dim complacency from the walls. One felt sure that one was going to drink some of Von Arnault's excellent white wine. I found myself comparing this with the grim Sabbath meals I had known at home. Then Von Boehn came in, radiating health and fresh air, and kissed the baroness' hand, and clicked his heels, and tapped Von Arnault with familiar friendliness on the shoulder, and nodded blithely to me. It was a perfect entrance, just the right amount of respect, just the right amount of non-chalance. Back of it was long training. No gesture went an inch too far; no gesture hesitated this side of grace. We sat down to table, and Von Boehn unfolded his napkin and leaned forward from the waist, the way officers do.

"Ach, Gnädige!" he said, in his nasal, fluting, latest Berlin accent, "I heard the most amusing and typical tale last night! You know young Foestner of the second squadron? Well, it seems he had occasion to ask an orderly before a formation if he'd had his lunch, and the fellow said he had, using the word *speisen*. And what do you think Von Foestner answered?"

Arnault was leaning forward interestedly; his wife was regarding Von Boehn with the question-

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ing smile with which the polite hostess anticipates a funny story.

"Why," said Von Boehn, "he roared out so that the whole squadron heard: 'You beast! You dog! Why do I not strike you? The Emperor eats that way, I eat ordinarily, like a man, you eat like an animal!' Famose, wasn't it? Colasal! The quickness of the young blood! It will be all over Germany in no time."

Now to appreciate the subtle wit of the foregoing, you must realize, as you no doubt do, that in German there are three words for eating; one to eat daintily, one to eat—just eat, the third to eat like a cow, or a horse, or a pig. And the unfortunate private had used the first word, the super-aristocratic one. I laughed heartily, of course, because I was too young not to laugh, yet I did feel those long finger-nails running up and down my back. And it was then, for the first time, that I noticed that Von Arnould and his wife did not always agree with Von Boehn's wit.

The baroness' lips still smiled, but her eyes were reflective.

"Ah, the poor soul!" she said. "How ashamed he must have felt!"

"I don't altogether like that, Von Boehn," said

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her husband, with knitted brows. "In formation, and all that. I think there's too much of that sort of thing growing up. You know what Manteuffel said in his order of 1885: 'Insults attack the sense of honor and kill it, and the officer who insults his subordinates undermines his own position.'"

Von Boehn grinned. "Lieber Karl," he said, "you have been so fortunate as never to have had to run an estate. Believe me, the peasant and the private soldier is a beast. They understand nothing but insult. If I have to beat my good dog, Hanschen, to enforce obedience, how then with the lower classes, who have not one half Hanschen's intelligence or delicacy?"

So then, there were Von Boehn's social theories in a nutshell; and here, also in a nutshell, is the way he put them into execution. I had many opportunities for observation. Perhaps the incident I am about to relate is not so obvious as some of the others, but I relate it because it has to me the virtue of being one of the few occasions on which Von Boehn got about as good as he gave. I had stopped in at barracks with him as he wanted to see his under-officers drilling recruits. There was sabre practice in the gray, foggy courtyard. A number of tow-haired,

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round eyed, alarmed youths were making clumsy motions under the harsh commands of the sergeants. There was one boy particularly who attracted my attention, he was so red checked, so blue eyed, so incredibly earnest and pathetic, and so hopelessly slow. Von Boehn watched him for awhile in silence. "God in Heaven!" he said at last. "Give me a sabre! No! No! I don't want any mask or pads! He couldn't hit me in a thousand years!" And he took the boy aside and faced him.

"Now!" he commanded. "Strike! So! This way! No, you dumb-head! So! Ach, for the love of God! You toadstool; you cabbage! Where was your mother when you were born, in a vegetable garden?"

I saw the boy's color growing deeper and I noticed that his blue eyes were becoming pin-points of flame, but I had no fear for Von Boehn, who was playing with him as an expert angler plays with a fish. At the last words, however, the victim suddenly lunged forward, broke through Von Boehn's guard, and buried the point of his sabre in his tormentor's sword arm. For a moment the boy maintained his position, an expression of agonized fear supplanting the anger in his face, then he drew back, and stood with

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bowed head, his hands clasped on the hilt of his sword. For a moment death glittered in Von Boehn's eyes; but he remembered himself, and, grasping his injured arm with his left hand, called a sergeant to him.

"Remember that young man," he said, nodding at the motionless recruit. "He is very strong; he will need plenty of hard work." He faced about curtly. "I'll see the surgeon," he said to me. "Then we'll go along. We're due at the Arnaulds' at five." Between the fingers of his left hand blood was oozing.

So——! I could tell you many stories of a more or less similar kind, some of them even amusing, although no less indicative of Von Boehn, and the Von Boehns about him—the time, for instance, when we were bob-sledding on the hills outside the town and I, making the ascent, saw Von Boehn flash past me, clasping with a grim determination, from his seat in the rear, the form of the evidently inexperienced lady who was steering.—I cannot resist finishing this brief episode. There was only one tree near the course, but for that the sled was heading with a fascinated exactness. "Jump!" I yelled. "Jump!" Mutilation seemed imminent. Von Boehn probably never heard me; he was looking straight

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ahead; in the rays of the sunset opposite, his monocle glittered like the headlight of a runaway locomotive. But jump he did, and just in time. Together he and the partner of his adventure rolled desperately to the bottom of the hill; then Von Boehn slowly disengaged himself, rose to his feet, brushed the snow off his clothes, and kissed the hand of his sorely shaken companion. In his eye his monocle remained undimmed. "We'll start again," he said; and they did.

The point is that through incidents such as these I achieved in two years a fairly clear idea of the character and the opinions and the traditions of a Prussian aristocrat, and it is necessary to understand this character and these opinions and these traditions to appreciate fully what was to follow. . . .

After that, I forgot all about Von Boehn and the Arnaulds and the rest of them, except as interesting occasional recollections, until the autumn of 1914. Then I saw in a newspaper that Von Boehn was in the administration of Belgium, whether as one of Von der Goltz's henchmen, or in a military capacity, I couldn't quite make out. Two years later, I met Truxton who had been in relief work in the tragic occupied countries. I

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asked him about Von Boehn without the slightest notion that he would ever have heard of him.

"Oh yes," said Truxton, with an odd compression of his lips. "Yes, I know him. I saw quite a lot of him. He was around Namur for awhile."

"You got along with him?"

Truxton—we were having dinner together—twisted a bottle of claret between his fingers and studied the label. "Oh yes, I got along with him all right." Suddenly he looked up. "I wish for that man," he said solemnly, "a horror that as yet I haven't even been able to formulate in my mind. I'm thinking it over.— When I've come to a conclusion I'll let you know." This, from Truxton, was interesting. By profession he is a teacher of English in a great university, and one associates neither a desire for revenge nor a desire for torture with his mild, bespectacled personality; at least, one didn't then, for one didn't, at the time, know as much about Germans as one does now.

"For more than most of them?" I asked.

"Oh no—they're all equally bad, but I happened to see a particular lot of Von Boehn—I got a more correct idea of his psychology."

He apparently changed the subject abruptly. "The fundamental idea of all decent religions,"

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he said, "has always seemed to me to be contained in those words of Micah's: 'and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' You know—it's what's summed up in the old Western expression 'to have the fear of God in your heart'? What the Greeks spoke of as a knowledge of your relationship to other men—I can't recall the exact word. Anyway, it means that you should go about realizing that your soul is just the same sort of soul as anyone else's soul, and that your body is just the same sort of body as anyone else's body. That all chances of life that make one man a nobleman and another a peasant, that make one man a German and another a Belgian, are subordinate to the one essential fact that the flesh and spirit of the world is a common gift. There are two ways of sinning against this law; you can sin against your own soul and body and thus insult the souls and bodies of everyone else, or you can sin against someone else's soul and body and thus insult your own. Of course, the Germans aren't sensitive enough to realize that every time one woman is raped the whole idea of womanhood is raped, or that every time a dead body is scorned all death is scorned; and you could forgive them if

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their obtuseness came from mere brutality, or was individual, or the result of drunkenness, or sheer lust, but it doesn't. It's antichrist—it's a denial of God's presence in all men; and a cold-blooded, calculated denial at that."

"And Von Boehn, of course, was very bad at that sort of thing?"

Truxton stared at me fixedly. "Bad! He was the epitome of it! He reminded me of some damned aristocrat of Louis the Fifteenth's time walking through a plague stricken city, holding a bottle of smelling-salts to his nose so he wouldn't be bothered by the corpses. Again and again I've wished that he was a drunken beast, or a Cossack, or anything on which one could find some angle to lay hold. You broke your heart on a wall of ice. Rigid immunity is the hardest thing to buck up against in the world. I saw him at the time of the deportations. It wasn't, you understand, that he was cruel through hate; any passion like that, bad as it is, would have been preferable; it had simply never occurred to him that a nobleman and a German shouldn't do exactly what he felt like. He wasn't in the position where he had to express the outward deprecation that was necessary for some

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of those fellows Von Bissing had around him. He was entirely himself."

"You must remember," I interposed, not for the purpose of defending Von Boehn, but to draw Truxton out, "he isn't altogether to blame personally—he's had generations back of him. His trouble is that he has never at any point touched life outside of his own class, a Prussian class, at that. You can see something of the same thing even over here in the sons of the very rich. How can a man appreciate degradation when he sees no chance of ever being degraded, and how can he appreciate fear when he has had drilled into him the superstition that fear cannot touch a gentleman? He's never allowed himself to believe, you see, that the occasional stirrings of his heart which he must have felt, in common with everyone else, were such a thing as fear."

Truxton interrupted me with a sort of shining eagerness. "Ah!" said he, "that's exactly the point! He's armored against the world with a monstrous armor."

"You mean?"

Truxton's spectacles glittered. "You don't know anything more about fear or degradation," he said, "than Von Boehn, but being a democrat, and therefore having some native humility and

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some power of introspection, you have cultivated your imagination sufficiently to be able, at least dimly, to put yourself in another man's place." He continued to stare at me as if he had said something convincing.

"What in the world are you talking about?" I asked incredulously. "Not know what fear is! My dear man! Perhaps I don't know degradation, but fear—! Why, there's not a man living who won't admit that he's felt it, except the Von Boehns and the liars."

Truxton shook his head. "I repeat," he said, "that you have no idea. You couldn't have, unless you've been a prison warden, or have participated intimately in a lynching. It doesn't happen to a man who leads any kind of an ordinary life. It's a cataclysm." The fingers of his hand outstretched upon the table opened and shut slowly. "I'm not talking about clean fear," he said; "about the decent shakiness with which a man squeezes past death, or even the abject cowardice with which most of us, even the sceptical, have once or twice held our ground, or run away from what we thought was the supernatural; I'm talking about real fear—the most shocking thing I know. Something that to be anywhere around makes you ill at your stom-

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ach, for it's a stripping away of the last reserve of personality, the last reticence of the soul. It's worse than seeing a corpse mishandled. It makes all the mystery of humanity as cheap as a battered tin tray. And it can only come, the quintessence, when a man feels that he is helpless to prevent the crushing of his individuality between the dirty fingers of someone else. It's the ultimate outrage. It couldn't very well happen on a battlefield, or through nature—so long as a man can raise one finger, he's, well, he's still fighting, anyway, but the other thing—. Most of us in Belgium have seen it enough to know what it is, anyhow." He looked down at his hand.

"And Von Boehn," I asked, after a pause, "watched it in his shining armor unmoved. Is that the point?"

"He was a little amused," answered Truxton. "Yes. That's the point."

A few days later, Truxton sent me a letter. "I forgot to tell you the other night," he said, "that, among other things, our friend Von Boehn occasionally went in for the good old-fashioned Russian pastime of knouting. We couldn't prove it, and it wouldn't have done any good if we had. But I know it to be a fact. Look up knouting—it's interesting. It's said to have a

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peculiar psychological effect on a man's personality. He never quite gets over it. There was a little Belgian lawyer who had bothered Von Boehn considerably. He arrested him for espionage, but there was no proof—not even enough for a German. The Belgian was a brave chap. I saw him later—he was still brave, more so, but he had the most curious worm-like quality at the back of his brain to fight against. You've seen a worm, partly crushed, trying to drag itself over the ground? . . . Be sure to look up knouting."

A nice fellow, my former playmate! I proceeded as best I could to follow his subsequent career. But there wasn't much to be heard, and then, soon, there was the almost entire silence that followed that splendid May when the common folk of a democracy informed an emperor that he was a liar.

Only recently have I come across Von Boehn's tracks again. There was something about him in a newspaper, and I heard directly and in detail from a man who was not far away at the time and who later interviewed people who were immediate. I have the letter now on my desk. But knowing Von Boehn, I would have needed only that little newspaper paragraph to have con-

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structed the rest. It is the simplest trick of the imagination. It isn't even changing the point of view of this recital, or assuming an attitude of omniscience. Prussian officers are cut from one cloth; given certain premises, you can predict even their thoughts, certainly their most minute actions, as if you yourself had been with them every minute of the day. That's the penalty of disingenuousness, once you've the key to it, it is as easy to read as any other involved code.

It seems, when peace came, that Von Boehn was back again in a small Belgian town. He had a battalion of soldiers with him. They had not expected peace, he and the other officers. They were aware that things were not going altogether well at Berlin, but they had lived before through rumors and threatened political upheavals. It was the army that counted, and the army was sound. To be sure it was falling back, but that was only to obtain the advantage of a shortened line. Once that line was reached . . . Dear Heaven! they could see the English and the French and the Canadians, and the rest of the polyglot crew, flinging themselves against the smoking cliff like a broken sea, as Von Boehn and several of the others had often themselves seen them in the past four years. As for the

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Americans, they didn't believe the stories they had heard about them. Brave? Yes! But you couldn't even teach a man to salute properly in six months. Another winter of firmness, and the thing would be over; not with victory, that was too much to hope any longer, but with 'a strong German peace,' as the Emperor had said.

Von Boehn was even more contemptuous of rumor than his duller companions, although even more than they he desired relaxation—if only for a little while—from the strain to which he had been subjected. War was beginning to trouble his well-leashed nerves. Love and war, undoubtedly those were the only things, but just at present there had been too much of war, and not half enough of love. He was beginning to want Berlin with a constant ache—not Berlin for a week or so of leave, but Berlin in long draughts, and parties unhaunted by the thought of a return to the front, and particularly pretty eyes to look into and hold and finally subdue. It was a pity he was so fastidious, but then, he couldn't have followed the example of some of his brother officers even had he wanted to; he had been always in positions of prominence, perhaps this last position the least prominent of all. It was

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dull enough anyway, the Lord only knew! He was especially bored on this particular evening.

He went to a window of his office that overlooked the square. A blue November night was beginning to creep along the narrow streets, filling the open places, ascending the buttresses of the cathedral opposite. A few people were abroad. He saw a sergeant stalking towards the door of the Komandatur. 'Old Schmidt!' A good man. Splendid fellows, those under-officers! The backbone of the army!

A door opened behind him. It must be Kessler his adjutant to come in that way without knocking. What an uncouth dog! Why couldn't they surround gentlemen with gentlemen? He faced about. It was Kessler, standing with a telegram in his hand, the most curious drooping-mouthed look on his face.

"Well," asked Von Boehn, "what's the matter? Have you seen a ghost? Besides, salute, Kessler! You're getting lax."

"Thunderweather!" said the adjutant. "Yes—I have seen a ghost." He held out the telegram.

"What is it?"

"An armistice, my colonel. Tomorrow it will probably be signed."

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Von Boehn strode towards him and seized the paper from his hand.

"Impossible!" he cried. "We've heard nothing about it but rumors."

"This is from Brussels. Our envoys have been in the French lines three days already."

"Then they consent to our terms?"

Kessler laughed mirthlessly. "It is we who consent," he said. "Read!"

Von Boehn glanced at the telegram and threw it down on the desk. "The fools!" he said savagely. "The army is as strong as ever. I know it."

Kessler looked at him a moment with his long-nosed inscrutability. "You will have orders to give later on, I suppose?" he said. He left the room noiselessly.

Von Boehn went again to the window. Incredible! What were they up to? Well—he drew back his shoulders; well, after all, it was no defeat. Germany was intact. He supposed the Great-Headquarters knew what they were about. But why couldn't they have kept a fellow in touch with things? His sense of dignity was wounded. Presently an unexpected coolness of relief stole into his mind. He was glad the thing was over, anyhow. In fifteen years or so, they

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would be ready again; in the meantime; first his place in Pomerania, and a long sleep, and rest, and food; and then Berlin. He wanted pretty eyes frightfully. Yes, he was really glad war was over, even if the ending wasn't quite as glorious as that first initial swoop—like eagles plummeting on their prey. In the darkness of the square he saw a number of civilians standing about in groups, talking earnestly. The rats were beginning to crawl out of their holes already! Then some bugles blew. He looked at his clock. Exactly punctual! Things were still not so bad when bugles blew on time.

He went to the door, and stuck his head into the adjoining room.

"Mess, Kessler!" he said. "What shall it be, the Gold Lion?"

"Jawohl, Oberst!" answered the adjutant.

They had said practically the same thing to each other at the same hour for almost half a year.

Nor the next day did Von Boehn find his life greatly altered. He was depressed, who wouldn't be, but he was astonished that he wasn't more depressed. Word of the signing of the armistice came through, and suddenly, with a great strident joy, the bells of the cathedral swung into sound.

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The square was black with a silent multitude. It had been there since dawn; perhaps most of it all night. But it was a silent multitude; entirely orderly. "The dogs" knew better than to create a disturbance just yet, or for some days to come.

At noon Von Boehn swaggered across the square with only Kessler at his heels. The people drew back for him as formerly, but they didn't take off their hats. Only one voice shouted; a distant voice, he couldn't tell exactly from where it came.

"Swine!" it said.

Von Boehn gripped his sabre. He looked at Kessler. Their eyes met. Von Boehn laughed contemptuously. "What beasts they are!" he said. "Never mind, we'll get them again some day. Then none of this kind-heartedness."

He made a little speech to his officers at mess. He was not in the habit of dining with them, but he made an especial occasion. They must be very careful during the next few days; walk on egg shells. In a short while would come orders, and then they would know what to do. Probably back to Germany—dear Germany! And undefeated—they must remember that. All the honors of the war had been theirs. But one couldn't fight the whole world. And now, re-

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member, words couldn't hurt a German gentleman any more than the grunting of hogs. They were dealing with hogs.

After that he felt more cheerful. There wasn't very much to do back at the Komandatur; it was necessary to wait for further instructions. Most of the afternoon he watched the townspeople from his windows. Their attitude satisfied him. Apparently they had no desire further than to talk and gesticulate in groups.

Kessler, being a common man and nearer the hearts of the common people, was not so well pleased.

"I wish they weren't so silent," he said. "I hear that in some other places they are celebrating."

"Why shouldn't they be silent? They know better than to make a fuss."

"Noise is a safety-valve." Kessler glanced sideways at his commander. "You know, Herr Oberst, you have been especially noted for discipline."

"And still am," retorted Von Boehn grimly. His overwrought nerves suddenly snapped. "Armistice, or no armistice," he exploded, "we're still here! God in Heaven, I alone would face a hundred shopkeepers and turn them tailwards!"

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That was the trouble with having men who were not gentlemen for officers! What could Kessler know of the unshakable power a gentleman always had with those below him? What could a reserve officer know of the real discipline of German troops?

So he wasn't prepared—Von Boehn—for what was to happen within the next twenty-four hours. . . . The full terms of the armistice had come in. That was bad enough. They would have to get out, and speedily. Well, they would, damn it; but they'd come back; oh yes, some day; like the sword of the Assyrians. . . . At ten o'clock there was a trampling on the stairs beyond the outer office; then Kessler's voice, very sharp; then Kessler's voice drowned in the murmur of other voices, just as on a windy day the sound of a wave is overwhelmed by the waves that come after; and then the door to Von Boehn's room swung open. In the aperture were a dozen non-commissioned officers with old Schmidt in the lead. For a moment they stood blinking, half truculent, half ill at ease, before Schmidt spoke. He drew himself rigidly to attention; saluted.

"We have come to tell you, Herr Oberst," he said, "that you will remove all insignia of your

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rank, and that you will give to us your sword and your other side-arms."

For a moment Von Boehn stared at him, his eyes widening slowly like those of a cat about to spring. The next moment, his automatic, a little streak of light, leaped from the scabbard, twinkled in the air, and came to rest full on the second button of Schmidt's tunic.

"You dog!" said Von Boehn.

Schmidt's wrinkled face did not change color.

"You can kill me, Herr Oberst," he said quietly. "In fact, I expect you will, but you will be killed yourself immediately afterwards. And we do not want bloodshed; it would be a bad beginning."

Von Boehn reflected, "And how," he asked, "if I do what you madmen wish? Afterwards I shall have you arrested and lined up against a wall and shot."

Schmidt shook his head. "No," he said, "there is not one man in the town today who would obey your command."

"You mean?"

"I mean, Herr Oberst, that evidently you have not heard that in Germany the revolution is real. This afternoon the battalion marches home, unless they can find a train—they are old men, they

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are tired. You need have no care for the evacuation, the non-commissioned officers have it in charge. You can come, or not, as you wish. Your motor and driver are entirely at your disposal."

Von Boehn's hand, holding the automatic, fell slowly to his side; then he shrugged his shoulders, and walking over to the desk, threw the pistol on it. He unbuckled his sword and placed it beside the other weapon. With an amused contempt he proceeded to rip off his lapel tabs and his shoulder ornaments.

"Would you like my buttons?" he asked.

"No, Herr Oberst."

"Take what you want, then, and get out." Suddenly his voice rasped through the quiet like a saw. "Each man here," he said, "will one day pay for this with his life."

Schmidt did not answer. He picked up the sword and pistol, saluted, faced about, and, with a sign to his companions, stepped through the door and closed it behind him. Von Boehn waited until the footsteps died away before he called:

"Kessler!"

There was no answer.

He flung open the door. The outer office was empty. "Swine!" said Von Boehn to himself.

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"He was afraid of being left behind. He is no better than the rest—incredible filth that they are!"

What was he to do? Here were papers of four years to be sorted; some to be preserved, the rest destroyed. There were a hundred details to be attended to. For awhile he worked with a cold, precise fury; but after an hour or so, he sighed, drew back from the desk, and going over to the fireplace, built a fire and proceeded to heap upon it the accumulated books and records. When he was done, he looked at his watch. Three o'clock. An hour to pack his personal belongings in and then he would be off. He stood up, gazed about the wrecked office, and strode to the door. With his hand on the knob, he hesitated. Beside him, on the top of a modern American desk, was a little bronze statue; a boy playing a flute. Von Boehn regarded it with thoughtful, narrowed eyelids. He reached over slowly, picked it up, examined it, and, drawing back his arm, suddenly hurled it with all his might through the window opposite. His face was white with rage and his blue eyes shone. . . .

The halls beyond were strangely empty; hauntingly deserted. There were no sentries on the stairs, nor in the long corridors he traversed to

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reach his own apartment. Half asleep in a chair beside the door he found his military chauffeur. The unexpected human presence startled him. The man sprang to his feet.

"When will his Excellenz be ready?" he asked.

"In about three quarters of an hour. Have the car at the main entrance."

"The main entrance?" The man's lips drew together in doubt. Then he saluted. "Very good, Excellenz—There is a great crowd in the square, you know."

"Damn them," answered Von Boehn.

There was very little to do; he kept most of his things always in trunks; but he wished to change his uniform. Once he was interrupted in his preparations by the sound of men marching which came up to him from the street. He went to the window. The battalion was going by. There were no officers with it; old Schmidt was in the lead. Von Boehn's lips curled. The old fools! Wait until they struck the real army—the army returning from the front! A fat chance their revolution would have then! He would remember Schmidt—Oh yes, he would remember him! He looked at the retreating stolid back with the speculative eyes of a man who sees

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another walking to the gallows. Then he returned to his trunks.

But their packing took him longer than he had anticipated. There was a tapestry he had picked up lately in Namur that must be put in some way. It was quite the end of the afternoon by the time he was ready. He called his chauffeur and bade him carry down the three small military trunks. When this was done, he drew on his gloves and made ready to follow. From the drawer of a carved chest he took out an automatic pistol and slipped it into his empty scabbard. He smiled. That old fool Schmidt! He stalked down the empty corridor, down the silent stairs, and out on to the steps. He was still high above the square.

The sun was setting opposite him, and for a moment he paused, blinded by its red confusion. He had dressed himself very carefully, with a contemptuous desire to show these Belgian swine that his glory was still undimmed and the more practical purpose of turning up at the nearest headquarters with a uniform un mutilated. About his shoulders was a blue cloak, faced and lined with crimson, and he had put on his uhlan tunic and breeches that he had not worn since the beginning of the war. On his head was the swag-

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gering dress tschapka, with drooping plumes. The sunset surrounded his tall figure with an aura of quivering gold. He was like a statue set up to the arrogance of war. As he stood there he was not aware that in the crowd below him a thousand faces turned slowly in his direction, but, as his eyes became accustomed to the light, the blurred mass began to dissolve into individual heads and shoulders. He suddenly realized, with an unaccustomed little coldness about his heart, that he was very much alone, except for his chauffeur. . . . Von Boehn! He drew himself together. These last few days had been hard on his nerves, particularly this last business of the non-commissioned officers. But they were only Landstrum men. He mustn't begin to lose his faith in things. There was even more insolence than usual in his walk as he descended the steps.

Between him and the motor the sidewalk was jammed. He touched the man nearest to him on the shoulder.

"Would you stand back?" he said. "How can I reach my car?" He was astonished at the difficulty he had in putting the accustomed harshness into his request.

The man, a workman, gave way sullenly. A

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narrow lane began to open out. Von Boehn was aware of the rank smell of sweaty, unwashed bodies. He saw above the heads of the crowd the gray hood of his waiting motor. Suddenly a woman, a woman he could not see, began to screech close at hand. What a filthy voice she had! Damn women, anyhow!

"He killed my son!" said the voice. "Killed him—sent him away to Germany to die! Do you let him go?"

A deep breath went through the crowd, like wind across a lake.

"Do you give way?" asked Von Boehn quietly. He had been rather a fool to delay his departure so long.

"No!" said a man. He was a stout man with a black beard; he looked like a lawyer.

"It is a truce," said Von Boehn.

The man wavered. "Yes, yes," he said. "It is so. We forget ourselves." His full lips shut with a snap. "But you don't deserve it," he added.

Von Boehn stepped forward quickly, a feeling of relief expanding his muscles, and stepped full into a man in a blouse, who dove through the crowd like a catapult. Von Boehn threw up an arm and a flailing fist caught him square on the

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mouth. He staggered back, astonished and shaken. Then he recovered himself. This was no time to fight. He felt the blood trickling over his lip, and reached for his handkerchief. A hand from behind pinioned his arm, and he felt his pistol being lifted from its holster.

"So!" said a voice. "You would shoot, would you? Here's a shot for you then!" And a boot, with crushing force, caught him on the end of his spine. "Get to your car, Prussian," said the voice, "before it is too late!"

For a moment Von Boehn saw red, and he wheeled with a gasping snarl, broken splinters of pain running up his back to his shoulder blades, his face twisted with agony and fury. And then, as suddenly as it had come, his rage dropped from him, leaving only the trembling sickness of his hurt and a cold clearness of mind, for he saw, with an articulateness that had escaped his former pre-occupation to reach his car, the circle of faces about him; distinct, with their strained mouths and their glaring eyes. Beyond them he thought he saw other eyes; and beyond these still more; and he realized that there was a movement towards him in the crowd; that it was shutting in upon him like a monstrous vise of flesh. The apex of its control was past. It would crush him to

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death. He would be crushed by that dirty man with a beard opposite; crushed slowly and softly. A hazy recollection of the words he had said to Kessler came back to him; a despairing remnant of the traditions he had lived by. But he was unarmed! He drew himself up. "Stand back!" he said. "This is a truce!" But even as he said it he realized that he was ridiculous. His voice had no power in it; it was like someone else speaking far off. And he shouldn't have plead with them, he should have called them "Dogs!" Yet, on the other hand, if he had he might have hurried that pressure towards him; broken the bubble in which he stood. And he didn't want to do that. . . . There was that woman screeching again! . . . He had a confused impression of the bearded man being shoved towards him, a grotesque giant, half unwilling, shoulders pushing back, enormous stomach protruding; and he struck out wildly with his unaccustomed fists. They were going to tear the clothes from his body! No; they were too close. Hands flickered above his head like the rain of a cyclone. One of them drove his tschapka cruelly down upon his head; another brushed it entirely off. The thought came to him that he must keep his feet; he must never allow

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himself to go down under these shuffling boots. He drew his arms up with an immense effort and thrust them above him, and slowly, like a cork from the neck of a bottle too small for it, he found himself rising from the crowd, until he was head and shoulders above it.

For a second or so this was a relief; at least he had more air, and then, as his frightened eyes encompassed the tangled mass of humanity surrounding him, a new wave of sickness swept over him; the giddiness of agrophobia. This thing wasn't individual; it was writhing and vermicular; and it was reaching for him with a blind intentness. He gave a strangled cry and began to beat with his fists at the heads nearest him. His right hand was caught, held, and pulled down. He tried to drag it free. That was a strong devil that had hold of it! What was he trying to do? An excruciating pain shot up Von Boehn's arm. He—they were breaking his wrist! Good God! He beat impotently with his other hand. It too was caught, pulled savagely forward, and twisted. And suddenly Von Boehn raised his head and screamed; shrilly and continuously. He did not know at first that it was his own voice, until he became cognizant of it as a man would who was standing off and watching

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himself, were such a thing possible. He mustn't scream! He mustn't! He, Von Boehn! A German; an officer! He—But his voice wouldn't stop! It went on and on and on. It hurt his ears. . . . Where were they taking him? The pain at the end of his arms burst with a snap. Something seemed to break inside his head too. It fell forward; then over on his shoulder. . . .

When he came to himself he was in a little room with two Belgian policemen bending over him. Near at hand others were standing. He stared at them for a moment, then down at his hands. His wrists were in splints. He tried to speak, but only a queer broken croak came from between his lips. The memory of some intolerable shame, which he couldn't quite analyse, irritated him like a fever, made his head heavy.

The policeman on his right hand stood up.

"As soon as your Excellency is well enough to travel," he said, "I should suggest that you go. We will see to your safety."

Von Boehn nodded. They helped him to his feet, through a place that he remembered as a court-room, and so to a street that was almost deserted. His motor car was waiting; the lamps shining in the darkness. Von Boehn sank back on the cushions of the tonneau. A policeman

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took the seat beside him, another sat opposite; on the running-boards were four more. They rode with him until the town was left behind. Then they descended.

"I regret, your Excellency," said the policeman who had first spoken, "this accident. It was very unwise of you not to let us know the exact hour of your departure." He hesitated. He smiled. "I am afraid the people have become lawless in the past four years," he said, as he disappeared.

The car sped into the night. Von Boehn lay huddled up in the corner, rocking with the motion. There came over him again and again that strange nauseated feeling of irritation and shame. Once he almost whimpered. There was some memory of that last fight of his trying to make itself clear in his mind. It was a memory not to be obliterated he felt. How could he wash it out except to go back and face those people again, or else kill himself? And either of these actions, that a little while ago would have seemed so simple to him, now seemed impossible. . . .

Here's the third communication I got on the subject from Truxton, turned war-correspondent. I said "the third." Well, that's all right. I hadn't meant to name Truxton as the writer of

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the letter that gave me a detailed description of Von Boehn's flight, but it makes no real difference if I do. The third letter was one of Truxton's inevitable postscripts. He thinks too fast ever to say or write all he means to say or write at one time.

"By God!" said the third letter, with a profanity that was, as is so often the case, the most sincere of prayers. "His damned shining armor is stripped from him. He's naked to the world!"

DEVILLED SWEETBREADS

MY first sight of Mr. Peace was impressive. He was pursuing, with an uplifted butcher-knife, a small, active dark man up and down the deserted, sun-warmed dust of a sort of three-sided patio formed by long, low-lying log cabins. There was perfect silence, sinister silence, except for the late July stridency of the cicada, the chuckling of the near-by river, and the rhythmical padding of Mr. Peace's feet and those of his victim.

Mr. Peace's hair, blond, vikingish, a little too thick in front, but obviously well brushed, rose and fell with the violence of his effort, possibly of his emotions. Under a short blond mustache his chin was thrust forward, giving an impression of anger co-existent with shortness of breath. One judged, although much inferior in bulk, the small man, where running was concerned, had greatly the advantage. Not that Mr. Peace was fat; he was not; but he had reached the age—fifty-odd—where blondness as a rule narrows either to sallowness or else ripples into a certain happy expansion.

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For me there was too much astonishment to permit of any motion except the automatic ones of dismounting from my horse and standing open-mouthed, my hand on my revolver. You would be startled yourself if, coming from a long day of entire quiet, from eighteen miles of deserted river road, you had traversed the sun-dappled coolness of an aspen-grove, turned a corner, and suddenly been shot into a scene such as I have been describing. Its taciturn activity was outrageously at variance with the surroundings; with the suspended lazy stillness of the little shining patio, the further, sweet-smelling stillness of encircling alfalfa-fields, the cathedral-like solemnity of the background of pines, where, under the rays of a sun dipping toward the west, they soared above the battlements of the overhanging mountains with spires bathed in misty gold.

But Mr. Peace and the unwilling participant of his undertaking had reached a point where relevancy is no longer a consideration. They were entirely absorbed in their primitive pastime. They threaded the narrow confines of the court with the earnest abandon of actors in a symbolic dance. Behind them their shadows made desperate endeavor to keep up.

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It was the small man who broke the rhythm. Evidently at the end of his resources, he decided upon a perilous expedient; he wheeled, ran straight at his opponent, and with an ape-like agility granted only to mankind in moments of imminent peril, within a foot or two of the circle of danger, leaped to one side and swarmed up a log pillar of the porch that overhung the nearest of the cabins. Here, feeling himself comparatively safe, he sat down cross-legged and, with a most insulting far-away look in his eyes, spat down into the dust, not too remotely from the baffled feet of his intending executioner.

For a moment the latter regarded him with the expression of a puzzled dog, then, in a climax, a final gigantic outburst of rage, drew back and sent the knife flying into the soft wood of the pillar, where it stuck quivering. It was what my friend, Jenny Roquelaure, who comes from Indiana but married a Frenchman, would call "a magnificent gesture." I did not, however, fail to remark that it would have been just as easy and considerably more lethal to have hurled the knife at the overly confident possessor of the roof.

Mr. Peace, as if the episode was closed, sat down on the step of the porch and mopped his forehead with a multicolored bandanna handker-

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chief of silk. At the moment a young man was rounding the corner of one of the cabins. He was a very elegant young man, tall, slim, black-haired, clean-shaven, dressed in excellently fitting khaki riding-breeches, brown boots that twinkled, and a white shirt open at the throat. He walked slowly and with a certain air of lackadaisical detachment that did not in the least conceal a very real liteness and strength of limb. With a swift glance from under lazy eyelids he took in the small man on the roof, Mr. Peace on the step, and myself, hesitant in the background, and I thought an expression of weariness darkened his trim features, but the next instant it was gone, and he crossed to where Mr. Peace was sitting and sank down beside him, and began to roll a cigarette with an engaging lack of inquisitiveness.

Possibly Mr. Peace was shamefaced; his supercilious casualness seemed perhaps a trifle too pronounced; but he was, none the less, very unperturbed. "Hello!" he said brightly. "I've just discharged your cook." Then he became absorbed in the thoughtful movements of a hen, who had appeared from nowhere and was promenading the patio with the languid rolling walk of one whose stomach is for the time being satiated.

The young man continued to roll his cigarette,

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but before it was completed threw it down and spoke with a bitter dryness. "I hated his fried potatoes!" he said.

On the roof Mr. Peace's escaped victim stirred sharply from his assumed boredom and drew himself together with a little shudder of rage.

"It is not potatoes," retorted Mr. Peace, with grave indignation, "not potatoes, disgraceful as they were. Potatoes I can forgive, providing if back of them I can discern the faintest sign of a kindly heart, the weakest flicker of human intellect. But when a degenerate"—here he raised his voice—"ignorant, black-hearted, cross-eyed son of a dog—"

"Liar!" screamed the small man furiously.

"—from the lowest slums of Naples," proceeded Mr. Peace, "vents his so-called wit on me I become irritated." He paused and looked at the young man beside him with an expression of restrained anger. "It was my mustache," he added. "He objected to it being waxed."

"He did?" The young man's tones were soothing. "I don't blame you."

Mr. Peace was galvanized into action. He sprang up from the porch and pointed a dramatic finger at the figure on the roof. "Did you hear that?" he thundered. "Down from your perch

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and pack your things! To-morrow the stage leaves from Conant; see that you catch it! In the meantime—" He lowered his voice and looked sideways at the young man—"I shall be delighted, my dear fellow, to cook for you until you procure another incompetent." With a large gesture, indicative of entire dismissal of unpleasant things, he turned about and walked off with dignified slowness.

His companion remained where he was, blowing meditative clouds of cigarette-smoke into the air.

You must remember that at the moment I hadn't the faintest idea who Mr. Peace was. I knew him only as a blond giant with what seemed homicidal tendencies. I had been imagining him a Swede; one does, you know, if one has worked with Swedes; one falls into the way, that is, of associating silent, ungovernable rages with the Scandinavian temperament. Consequently I had been listening to the recent outburst of oratory with a growing fascination, for here was no Swede, but indisputably an Eastern American; an Eastern American who could have come only from a very limited class, the most typical members of which you find sitting in clubs at four o'clock of an afternoon looking for some one

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with whom to play bridge. There was no mistaking the resonant, not too interested voice, the truncated, slightly nasal, casual preciseness of accent. And here was this good man pursuing with a butcher-knife an Italian cook through the remote peace of a Wyoming July afternoon!

I stepped forward. In my pocket was Mrs. Minturn's letter. For her it was a long letter, delicately blue in color, advanced in texture, folded in an inconvenient but no doubt newly fashionable manner. Ten miles back, where I had camped for lunch, I had taken it out and reread it. Upon the hot, dusty noon, pungent with sage-brush, a faint provocative perfume had stolen. Mrs. Minturn's letter—I had never, despite a fairly near blood relationship, been quite admitted to the inner circle, the large inner circle, that called her Violet—irritated me; almost always her letters, for they were always commands, irritated me. They sent me always in just the opposite direction from which I wished to go. But somehow or other I went. People did. Mrs. Minturn divided her world into senders and goers. Beauty, surviving triumphantly a quarter of a century, coupled with great wealth is infinitely more potent than the usual modern prerogatives of royalty. The perfume of Mrs.

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Minturn's letter was sufficient in itself to make the ordinary man go anywhere at any time.

I approached the languid young man. "I am looking," I said, "for the Currycomb Ranch and for a Mr. Johnson."

He raised his beautiful eyelashes. "I'm Johnson," he answered.

"I have a letter from Mrs. Minturn saying that she expects to be here this week with her daughter, and asking me to look you up. I hope it's all right. The letter was delayed, because I've been north, on the other side of Ten Strike. It should have reached me three weeks ago, but—"

He cut me short with a fierce gesture of his arm, not in keeping with his general air of calm indifference.

"Good God!" he said bitterly, "so you're another victim, are you? She couldn't be satisfied with the prospects of the ordinary males to be found about a place like this! I wonder if she knows any other young men in the neighborhood, or wandering through here? I suppose they'll come riding in now, two or three a day. Well, put up your horse. I'm glad to see you, even if you are weak-minded."

I found myself considerably nettled. "I don't

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know what you're talking about," I objected. "I happen to be a cousin of Mrs. Minturn's. As for being weak-minded—"

"Oh, they all say that," he interjected wearily. "Come along!" He took the bridle of my horse and proceeded to lead him in the direction of what turned out to be the corrals.

"Sometimes," he said coldly, "life becomes insupportable. There's Peace, now."

"Peace?"

"Yes, Mr. Peace. The man who was chasing my cook. Why didn't you interfere?" He stopped and faced about on me with a look of grave interrogation.

"I don't know," I answered lamely, "I'm sure. I haven't the faintest idea why I didn't. Ordinarily I would, but—look here"—there was a confused perception struggling in my mind—"do many people interfere with Mr. Peace?"

"No," he said, "that's just the trouble. They don't. He's always been the blond beauty and run the whole show. Well, it wouldn't have been any use interfering; he'd simply have chased you, too. And he never hurts anybody. He discharges a cook about once a month. He won't leave them alone. He's always telling them how to season things, or how to make a new sauce, or

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some damn silliness. But he's a good cook himself. You'll see to-night." He sighed heavily, and with lowered head continued on his way to the corrals.

"Who is Mr. Peace?" I asked.

"You've got me!" He looked up with faint amusement in his eyes. "He's been around this country for five years or so. Usually he stops here; sometimes he gets hurt and goes away for a month or two. He's very easily hurt. All I know is that he takes the *Providence Journal*, and seems to have been everywhere and to have met innumerable people." He stopped again and regarded the horizon. "Sometimes," he said grimly, "I think I'll kill him, and then when he's away I miss him like the devil. He's frightfully maternal."

"Maternal!" The adjective seemed curious.

"Exactly! I might be his only boy. I haven't been allowed to have wet feet for five years. And you ought to see him with chickens! We have real eggs now all the time. Oh, well, it's a curious world. Sometimes I think I was just born in it to be bothered."

This was an intriguing reflection coming from a young man who apparently had wealth and excellent physical well-being, and who was un-

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doubtedly good-looking, and who, unless Mrs. Minturn changed her mind or there was a train-wreck, would within two days see the object of his affections in the person of Mrs. Minturn's daughter Geraldine—a very intriguing reflection! I wondered if he knew the Minturns were to be here so soon. In my pocket Mrs. Minturn's letter seemed to glow with the faint, shining presence that surrounded all the things she touched. I recalled its contents.

“DEAR RODDY:

“I know you are somewhere within a radius of a hundred miles of a young man named Garth Johnson. Perhaps you know him. Will you look him up and write me about him, and possibly could you manage to stay, or return, when Geraldine and I arrive? I know this sounds absurd. It has, however, some reason. Yes, Geraldine and I are going to visit a ranch. I don't know what a ranch is, and I am sure I don't care to know. You have always bored me when you talk of them. Otherwise, I love you. But this is a homœopathic cure for Geraldine. She has been very bothersome; she thinks she is in love with this young creature. They met a year ago when he was East. I know nothing about him, ex-

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cept that he is not bad-looking and seems to have a little money. But Geraldine is my only child, and I have other plans. I think a month or two on a ranch will cure her. Geraldine has a romantic head, but a most material digestion. I am staking all on the latter. At all events, it has reached a point where drastic measures are necessary. I cannot go on. Geraldine is acutely annoying. My summer is quite spoiled. I had planned many things. I even have a Rumanian prince who wishes to marry me. He is exquisitely stimulating. But he could not abide a ranch, so I leave him at home.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"VIOLET MINTURN."

She invariably signed herself my cousin when there was any particularly unpleasant or unnecessary task she wished me to undertake.

By now the young man and I had reached the corrals. He unsaddled my horse, opened the gate, and turned him in to the tender mercies of forty or so bored cow-ponies. They made him excessively unwelcome. Johnson regarded this lack of cordiality gloomily. "Just like people," he pondered. He leaned his arms on a near-by fence and brooded upon the sunset.

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"For heaven's sake," he observed out of a meditative silence, "don't tell Peace Mrs. Min-turn and her daughter are coming. I don't know what he'd do. He hates women—and now we have no cook."

We went up to the very charming ranch-house. It was a little dusty, as bachelor ranch-houses are likely to be, but it was spacious and cheerful and characteristic, with its numerous skins on floor and wall, its collection of guns, paralleled against the logs on racks of deer-feet, its easy chairs and big open fireplaces.

"To-morrow," said Johnson, "we'll begin to clean windows." It was the first sign of the bridegroom garnishing his abode.

Mr. Peace met us half-way between the living-room and the dining-room, a long fork in one hand and a cook's cap set rakishly on one side of his head. Around his pleasantly protuberant middle was a cook's apron.

"Can't you hear the bell?" he asked angrily. "What's the use of having steak with cream-gravy if it's to get cold? All the other 'boys' are in there now—half through!"

He was a good cook. As I ate his offerings I reflected that even Geraldine's taste in such matters might be partially satisfied. He waited

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upon the table with extreme gravity. I noticed that the half-dozen or so young cow-punchers who worked for Johnson treated him with the utmost respect. It was "Yes, Mr. Peace." "Thank you, Mr. Peace." "I wouldn't be carin' for any, Mr. Peace."

When the meal was over Johnson and I went into the living-room, where shortly Mr. Peace joined us. He had removed the apron, but through some absentmindedness, or because it was by way of being a comfortable skull-cap, he still retained his cook's head-dress. He drew out a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles and, sitting down by one of the lamps, proceeded to read a newspaper with the most minute attention. Occasionally he commented upon its contents out loud, or clicked his tongue against his lips in graded indications of surprise or interest.

"Harriet Oglesby's remarried, Garth. That's the third time."

"Never heard of her."

"I don't know why you haven't. She was a very lovely young girl, but changeable even then."

"I've never been to Providence."

"But, my dear fellow! Mrs. Lamar-Roche! She's known everywhere. . . ."

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"Johnson," I said, when he was bidding me good night, "you're well taken care of."

"Isn't that the truth?" he answered, without lightness.

He hesitated a moment, his hands in his pockets, and shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. In the rays of the moon that fell upon us, I thought his young face was slightly haggard. "Look here," he said, his words tumbling on top of each other embarrassedly, "it may sound a queer thing to say, but—well, damn it, I don't want to marry Geraldine. No, I don't want to at all!"

I was a trifle shocked at first. Tradition seemed to tell me that this was an improper way to speak, but there was something so ingenuous in this confidence, something so suddenly friendly, that I found myself in a forgiving mood. Besides, I reflected, in Geraldine's class such matters were discussed quite candidly and cold-bloodedly. Only the unfashionable regard love-making as a secret.

"Well, why do you, then?" I asked.

"I'm not going to," he said firmly, "if I can help it. I like Geraldine—I like her awfully. I like her better than any girl I know; but I am not a fool, and I know that there's hardly a thing

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I love that she wouldn't hate." He indicated with a wide sweep of his arm the expanse of shadowy fields, the dreaming mountains beyond; a landscape odorous with the damp sweetness of a hill country at night, translucent where the moon bathed it, piercingly lovely, ethereal. "Imagine Geraldine in such surroundings!" he added.

"She will be day after to-morrow," I assured him grimly.

But I went to bed fairly well satisfied. This seemed one of the rare occasions when Mrs. Minturn's desires and the right of a thing were coincident.

One is always overlooking Geraldine. That's her misfortune for being the daughter of her mother. Had she been anybody else's daughter her prominence would have been undisputed. As it is, she is like a very smart diminutive purple aster growing in the shadow of an overpowering white lily, and in the presence of Mrs. Minturn even the most progressive prefer the languid lily to the candid aster. Feminist husbands have been known to go home and insult their frank, beautiful, and intelligent wives. Mrs. Minturn believed that sex was a dagger, not a thrashing-machine. And Geraldine, who belonged unequivocally to

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the new generation, would as soon slap a man as kiss him—both in a perfectly friendly spirit. She was the only person I knew who could shock her mother; while, fortunately for Geraldine, her mother's remonstrations were so hidden in the delicate double meanings of two decades ago that Geraldine mistook them as a rule for moral aphorisms: hypocritical, to be sure—Geraldine was not a fool—but none the less aphorisms. Geraldine was very pretty in a small, brown-haired, fresh-colored, sharp-glanced manner. Her voice was like that of a charming boy. Beside her Mrs. Minturn swayed, slim and dark and cream-colored, with lazy eyes into which headstrong men wished to dive as into hidden pools.

It was characteristic of mother and daughter that when they descended from the motor which had brought them from Ten Strike late on the following Friday afternoon, Geraldine should look as fresh as a morning flower, while Mrs. Minturn had the air of a camellia handled a trifle too roughly. But she was a warrior. She encompassed Johnson with a radiant smile.

"It is difficult getting here," she said, "but when one does—I"

"It's a rotten trip!" said Geraldine frankly,

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in her sweet, clipped voice. "You've got quite a place, haven't you?"

The implication was that it "wasn't as much of a place as had been expected, but that it would do." Johnson's face darkened, and he bestowed an obviously major portion of his attentions upon Mrs. Minturn. She cooed appreciatively over everything; settled into the room to which we took her like a lovely dove. But as Johnson and I went down the hallway I heard her say to Geraldine:

"For heaven's sake get me some hot water, and then go away! I've never had such a day!"

"Thank the Lord," said Johnson, who had apparently missed this remark, "Peace doesn't know anything about this arrival. Otherwise he'd be in Ten Strike by now." He chuckled. "It's the first thing he's missed on this ranch for five years."

Then we went over to our sleeping-quarters, and changed our clothes, and washed enormously, and put on neckties. Johnson took out a dusty bottle and sprinkled some sweet-smelling tonic on his hair.

"Swank!" he explained with a grimace.

And I must admit the inroad of feminine society was exciting. One has only to live on a

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ranch to realize the truth of such a statement. Johnson's cow-punchers were startlingly alert and well-scrubbed, and from unknown recesses some one had resurrected a pair of brass candlesticks and put them on the table. There was also a bowl of purple lupin. Mrs. Minturn, cool, dressed in a black evening gown, from which emerged disturbing shoulders, came into the room like moonlight when a door is opened. The young men arose as one, bowed, looked at her with mouths slightly agape; an imaginative ear could have heard their hearts beating. Geraldine, in casual riding clothes, followed, gazing at the double line of youths with knowing, frankly amused eyes that turned their admiration into a sudden hatred of women—all but one woman. Shortly afterward, from the depths of the kitchen, appeared Mr. Peace with bowls of steaming soup.

I have implied, I think, that in connection with his other accomplishments Mr. Peace was an excellent waiter: he had finesse; an evident pride in his duties. Possibly there was a trifle too much gesture; an infinitesimal overflourish, usually associated with the darker races, but otherwise the most critical could have found little fault. He was to rise to an apex of debonairness. At the moment he was carrying six bowls of soup on a

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tray. With no perceptible halt in the deftness and swiftness of his movements, he took in with darting eyes the long table with its two charming additions, and proceeded to the despatch of the task on hand. Mrs. Minturn was engrossed in a delicate scrutiny of her companions. I doubt if ever before she had seen gathered together so many lean and brown and beautiful young men. Mr. Peace, having set down his last bowl of soup, wiped his hand with a furtive gesture and, before astonishment could coalesce, was at Mrs. Minturn's side, leaning over an ivory shoulder.

"Hello, Pussy!" he said casually. "We've been expecting you for a week or so."

For the first time in my life I saw Mrs. Minturn visibly upset. She paused in the middle of a sentence, her great eyes widening, her rid lips a trifle apart. Finally she turned her head very slowly, as if expecting to see a ghost from her adventurous past.

Mr. Peace, his ridiculous cook's cap set rakishly upon one ear, was regarding her with a growing smile.

"Rene Peace!" he explained. "I haven't seen you, my dear, for twenty years. Just as young—
younger. I suppose it's a great relief having got rid of Charley? I told him he'd get into trouble

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if he drank so much. Just a moment, 'Shorty'!" —this to a soupless cow-puncher. He sped toward the kitchen. In the swaying doorway he paused. "That your daughter, Violet?" he asked. "Looks like Charley."

Geraldine made a face. Her mother turned a fascinated eye upon Johnson. "Where in the world—" she began.

Johnson, with bowed head, was attempting with a trembling hand to convey a spoon to his mouth. "I give up!" he spluttered. He spluttered again. "Pussy!" he murmured; and, detecting himself in a rudeness, blushed.

"It's an old nickname," explained Mrs. Minturn coldly. "Years ago at Bar Harbor—" She recovered her aplomb. "That, my dear," she nodded at Geraldine, "might have been your father."

"Well, at least he seems more useful than the one I had," retorted Geraldine, with the charming candor of her age and class.

Mr. Peace proceeded to garnish the night with surprises. Just how he accomplished the next one I do not know, but in some mysterious way he inveigled Mrs. Minturn, after supper, into the kitchen, where, to judge from the sounds and the conversation, he had set her to work helping

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him wash dishes. I haven't the faintest doubt that it was the first time she had ever dipped her lovely hands and wrists into soapy, disintegrating hot water. From the office, where I had gone to write a letter, I could not help but overhear the echo of quarrelling.

"You're the only person in the world for whom I would do such a ridiculous thing," said Mrs. Minturn, "and I do it because I pity you."

"Pity me!" snorted Mr. Peace indignantly. "It is I who pity you!"

Mrs. Minturn laughed disdainfully. "Why?"

"You are just where you were twenty years ago, while I have gone on." Mr. Peace's voice assumed the rounded tones of didacticism with which he not infrequently lectured Johnson. Evidently he was upon a favorite subject. "The upper classes," he proceeded oratorically, "fade away from not using their hands and from a lack of the impulse to earn their daily bread. A man is like an apple-tree, he will not grow good fruit unless he is pruned by the shears of necessity. The very rich and the hobo box the compass and in the end meet face to face, bereft of all ideals except the most animal ones. It was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me that twenty years ago I failed in business, for since then I have

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learned the secret of happiness. It is to know yourself capable with your arms and never to have at any one time so much money that the petty things of life, of which life necessarily is mostly made up, are dwarfed and insignificant. A quarter for a drink, my dear Violet, is more important to me than a limousine is to you; and I enjoy the drink, whereas you take the limousine as a matter of course. Taking things as a matter of course is the curse of the world. If I can't find surprises, I make 'em. My life, with little in it, is consistently exciting; your life, with everything in it, is consistently dull. . . . For heaven's sake, Pussy, if you break another glass I'll send you out of the kitchen!"

"I wish you wouldn't call me Pussy!" complained Mrs. Minturn bitterly.

Afterward they sat on the porch just beyond the window where I was writing. A faint, sweet-smelling breeze stirred the curtains and the night was flooded with moonlight. I don't think there was any harm in my being a not unwilling auditor. The two of them knew I was there; there was no attempt at concealment.

"Pussy," said Mr. Peace, "we might just as well, at the very beginning, understand each other. I know your ways. You have not

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changed. I am perfectly willing to be an excellent companion to you while you are here, but I will not be disturbed—mentally, I mean.”

“Oh!” commented Mrs. Minturn softly, “so you do regret it, do you?”

“No!” retorted Mr. Peace angrily. “Not a single thing! Not a thing—except, possibly, devilled sweetbreads. Sweetbreads I regret, for I am passionately fond of them, as you may remember, and for twenty years I have not tasted one cooked the way I like.”

“I haven’t the faintest intention of disturbing your bucolic slumbers,” observed Mrs. Minturn acridly. “You forget, my dear Rene, that you are fifty, and a little fat, and no longer in the world to which I belong.”

There was a portentous silence; then Mr. Peace spoke with a bitter solemnity. “Pussy,” he said, “if you talk that way to me I’ll slap you. I’ve done it before, and I’ll do it again. I will not be bullied.”

Mrs. Minturn’s answer was as unexpected as the threat. There was a sudden overlaying of softness upon softness of accent. It was the voice she used when she wished me to go upon any particularly disagreeable errand. “You wouldn’t dare!” she said. And the juvenescence

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of the reply and the proficiency of its tones—a proficiency antedating Delilah—destroyed what little was left of my equanimity.

Later on I found Johnson wandering abstractedly through the pines that surrounded the main ranch-house.

"Mrs. Minturn," I informed him, "is going to occupy herself greatly with your friend Peace."

"Then," he observed grimly, "he'll either marry her, or else chase her with a knife. He's a man of no half-way measures."

"She has conquered him before."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," were his parting words.

And indeed, the next morning, I saw what seemed clearly an initial victory for the subjugating male, but which, before my eyes, was turned into temporary defeat. Near the vegetable-garden, upon which, under a cloudless sky, the dew still sparkled, Mrs. Minturn and Mr. Peace were bending over, entirely absorbed in chickens. Mrs. Minturn was dressed in a riding-habit that was simplicity made dangerous. "Chickens," Mr. Peace was saying, "are the most heartrending creatures; they are so hot-eyed and helpless. Come along now, and I'll show you our milk cows."

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Mrs. Minturn answered with a pretty show of impotence. "Oh, I'm so sorry!" she cooed. "If I'd only known! . . . But I promised young Johnson I'd ride with him. After all, I do have to show some attention to my host, don't I?"

"Day after to-morrow," said Mr. Peace irrelevantly, "I'll be freer. There's a cook coming out from Ten Strike."

A week later Geraldine found me while I was fishing on the river. It was evident that she had sought me out. She made a charming picture as she parted the willows and looked, with wide, expectant eyes, up and down the bank. Rather like a twentieth-century dryad, or a self-contained nymph. Even modern youth cannot escape altogether the dewy elusiveness of youth. Finally she saw me and came over and sat down on a little pile of sand. She smoothed out the folds of her heather-colored breeches as if they were a skirt. "Isn't mother a devil?" she said disinterestedly.

I cast a fly and watched it with one eye half closed.

"She's insatiable," continued Geraldine; "and as she gets older she loses some of her subtlety."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I commented, although I did.

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"Then," said Geraldine, "you are either very stupid, or else very unobservant. For the past seven days she has been making love to everybody on the ranch, including yourself."

"She hardly speaks to me."

"That's her method with very shy, proud young men. In about a month you'd fall for it. But I don't care about you; what I do care about is Garth. He's a fool."

"She's only doing it to prevent him from marrying you."

Geraldine picked up a pebble and examined it judiciously. "In the beginning," she observed, "but not now. Now she likes the game for its own sake. Garth's beautiful, even if he hasn't any sense." She looked up. "Do you know, the only person in the world that mother's afraid of is that Mr. Peace."

"Why is she afraid of him?"

"Because he's the only person in the world who isn't afraid of her."

Geraldine got to her feet and brushed the sand from her breeches. Then she paused as if she had forgotten something. "Oh, by the way," she said, suddenly averting her eyes a trifle, "I'm going to marry Garth to-night."

"Does he know it?" I asked.

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She shook her head. "No; but I'm going to. It's time he learned decision. We're going to a dance at that ranch up the valley, and afterward I'll take him to the justice of the peace. I've telephoned the justice of the peace we'd be there at twelve sharp." She looked up quickly, her eyes bright and defiant, as if challenging me to interfere.

"But—but—" I stuttered. "Good God! Justice of the peace! What will your mother think of it?"

"It will be the best thing in the world for her," Geraldine assured me calmly. "It will be so shocking that she'll have nothing to say at all." She thrust her hands deep in her breeches' pockets and glared at me like a charming, insubordinate boy. "You wait and see!" she said.

"I'll punish Garth for this. And he'll marry me all right enough. It'll relieve his mind. There's no time a man feels such an ass as when he's flirting with the mother of the girl he ought to marry." Then she unexpectedly blushed, the crimson overlaying the red of her indignation, turned abruptly about, and walked off with a little truculent swagger.

One was left reflecting upon the odd outer changes that generations and their customs make

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upon the same essential dispositions. Geraldine was her mother brought up to date.

I avoided the mother that night. My guilty secret precluded my facing her still unshaken confidence in a world designed for her especial gratification. There is nothing more pathetic than the rich or beautiful suddenly forced to pause half-way in one of their gestures of magnificence.

At nine o'clock Geraldine, Johnson, and several accompanying cow-punchers, rode out of the ranch with a fine jingling of spurs and bridles. Mrs. Minturn and Mr. Peace, sitting on the front porch in the long twilight, watched them go.

"We are getting old," said Mr. Peace largely. "Fifteen years ago—a night like this—a dance!"

"We are merely learning to particularize," answered Mrs. Minturn softly.

I walked away. To-morrow Mr. Peace would not be so calm, I reflected. One did not sit long twilight hours alone with Mrs. Minturn and retain entire calmness—no, not even Mr. Peace; not even despite the accuracy of Geraldine's statements.

I think that was true, but whether it was or not, it was entirely lost sight of in the effect produced the next morning by Geraldine's announce-

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ment. She appeared at breakfast swimming in the light that surrounds, on a summer morning, the young and very healthy newly aroused from sleep. She kissed her mother.

"Garth and I were married last night," she said, with a quick calmness, as she unfolded her napkin.

If I had expected Mrs. Minturn to faint or make a scene I was greatly mistaken. After all, she had the resiliency of the patrician. She paled for a moment, but caught her color back. Her only sign of emotion was a slightly twisted mouth.

"You *are* impulsive," she said. She sighed. "I will have to think it over. It is a little sudden." She reflected. "Of course," she murmured, "I could be very disagreeable if I wanted to."

Geraldine was outwardly undisturbed. "Yes," she agreed, "but why? After all, you and I are fond of one another—and as for money, Garth has lots."

A curious green flickered for a moment in Mrs. Minturn's dark eyes. "You're not so impulsive, are you?" she observed.

During this breathless little scene, on the surface so casual, one had entirely forgotten the

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presence of Mr. Peace, who was sitting at the head of the table, cracking the top off a boiled egg. Now he made himself part of the colloquy with his accustomed vividness. He dropped his knife with a clatter. I looked in his direction and perceived a face swelling with rage. "What in the world—" I began mildly, but he interrupted me.

"Insolent!" he barked. "Unbearable! An outrageous child!" He picked up his knife and banged it down again on the table. "Violet!" he said, and got to his feet, and then sat down violently. "Physical punishment," he stuttered indignantly, "is not too much."

It was Geraldine's turn to become excited. "Why!" she gasped. "But— Why, you wretched creature! It was you yourself who advised me to do this. You! Not three days ago. Here, right in this very room! Didn't you talk to me about frankness, about the necessity of leading one's own life? Didn't you lecture me about cutting loose from the older generation; about—?" She closed her pretty mouth sharply, then spoke with an icy scorn. "You were jealous of Garth," she said, "and wanted to get rid of him. That was it."

"For heaven's sake," I managed to interject,

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"don't stir him up. He—he chases cooks with knives."

"I'm not afraid of him," said Geraldine. "Besides, this is my house now, and he'll have to get used to me, as he'll probably live here all the rest of his life."

"I'll not!" snapped Mr. Peace. "I'll leave to-day!"

"Don't be silly," advised Geraldine. "Even if you did leave you'd be back in a month."

"I—I—I!" In his baffled fury Mr. Peace gripped the edge of the table with both hands. "You—I justify myself," he said with an immense effort to control his voice. "Theoretically—yes, in my own life—radicalism! But—but when it comes down to personal cases—" He stood up and flung aside his napkin. "Damn it!" he gurgled, "the generations have got to stand together! Violet—I—I must have air!"

Geraldine watched his retreating figure. "He's just like father," she said musingly.

There was an odd soft little smile about Mrs. Minturn's mouth; an odd soft light in her eyes. She stared across the table for a moment as if Geraldine and I were not there, then she arose abruptly and left the room.

Shortly afterward I found Johnson restlessly

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paceing up and down in the neighborhood of the corrals.

"What's the matter with everybody?" he complained. "First out comes Peace, red in the face, saying he's going to leave at once, and then out comes Mrs. Minturn, asking for the motor, as she's going to take the afternoon train East. What's the matter with everybody? Can't I even get married without being annoyed? Geraldine's the only person in the world that knows what she's about. And now"—he gestured with one hand disgustedly—"Peace has changed his mind and gone to bed, and sends word that no one's to see him, and on no account to send for the doctor. It's too much!"

I sought Mrs. Minturn out. She was packing without precision but with determination.

"I've never been without a maid before," she said, "and I'll never be without one again. Half of Geraldine's things are mixed up with mine." She looked at me coldly. "I have made a fiasco," she observed. "I must go at once."

"But why do you leave so soon?" I objected. I find that at bottom I am romantic. Mr. Peace's championship of Mrs. Minturn that morning, the look I had surprised in Mrs. Minturn's

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eyes, had awakened my mind to what might be a charming possibility.

Mrs. Minturn was more explanatory than usual. "Because," she said bitterly, "I never make a fool of myself more than once in a month. I shall go back and marry my Rumanian prince. Rumania is about as far from Wyoming as you can get, isn't it?" She hesitated. "I'm running away," she concluded, more to herself than to me. "Yes, I'm running away. Hand me those shoes."

We all saw her off that afternoon. She kissed Geraldine coolly and gave her hand to Johnson with a devastating smile that embarrassed that impressionable young man. My hand she held for a perceptible second. "Why do I marry Rumanian princes?" she murmured vaguely, staring at the mountains. "I can imagine no more unhappy thing to do. The trouble with people like myself is that we know better, but we always do worse. A thousand things compel us. We never do the simple, happy thing. Mr. Peace refuses to see me. I trust he is not dangerously ill. Send me a telegram."

The driver threw in his clutch. The car started down the road and disappeared among the aspens. Mrs. Minturn was gone, leaving behind her a

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faint, provocative perfume that stirred upon the sleepy air.

It seemed to be my duty to find out how Mr. Peace was getting along. I found him with his knees cocked up under the bedclothes. He looked entirely well. On his face was the expression of one who has been listening for a sound.

"Has she gone?" he asked mysteriously.

I nodded in the affirmative.

"Hand me those cigarettes, then. I'll get up in a minute."

He lighted a cigarette and inhaled two or three reflective puffs.

"I nearly made a fool of myself," he said musingly. "When the world totters around me," he continued, "I always go to bed. It's safe." He studied the ceiling. "I'm glad, though, I didn't have to stay in bed for a week or two." He threw his cigarette away, and sat up straight. "Damn it all," he said, "I do miss devilled sweetbreads, though!"

Devilled sweetbreads, I dare say, are as good a symbol for the baffled desires of humanity as anything else.

A DREAM OR TWO

As soon as Welles mentioned her name you realized dimly that you had met her; you did, that is, if you had been born a Philadelphian, or had been a frequenter of that surprising city during the late 'nineties. Slowly your first vague recollections took more definite form, resolving themselves into memories of a figure, tall and graceful, of a small head, rather proudly carried, of blond hair and of blue eyes. Perhaps, more than anything else, you remembered her neck and shoulders; slim and white, and modeled with a directness of line and firmness of texture essentially American—perpetually virginal; at least they seemed so. They were not a warm neck and shoulders; there was no tenderness about them, but they were very lovely. The emotions they stirred were classic, not those associated with a goal or refuge. Certainly not the sort of person whom you would imagine expanding eventually into what Welles was disconnectedly trying to describe. . . .

Yes, of course. Her name had been Elsa

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Sloane, and she was the daughter of an alarming, repressed, iron-gray man, a banker or something, stolidly rich in the way of Philadelphians, who had stood about starched and rigidly polite at parties. There had been a dinner or two where you had sat next to her, and a ball or two where you had danced with her—those delightful old balls, where they played the waltzes of Strauss and Berger and there was a shimmering unreality of flowers and lights and manners that seems to have vanished with this armor-plated age. For one thing, you were not constantly depressed by the feeling that all gaiety insulted in some round-about way some one else's social theories—and once you had whispered to her through the darkened moments of a dull theater party . . . after which, collecting all these memories and assigning them to their positions of respective importance, you came back once more to Welles, seated before your fire, gesturing in his languid, rather embarrassed fashion, and to the later years of Elsa Sloane.

"He's getting very famous."

"Who?"

"Raphael Fortescue, her husband. They placed him on a par with Sargent. His portraits of women—even better, they say. The English,

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of course, since he's English, place him above Sargent. Rather a thing—"

"What is?"

"Well, rather a thing—born rich and the son of an old county family, and all that, and then to make of himself a great artist."

You remembered the neck and shoulders. "She couldn't have been much of a help."

Welles smiled cryptically; possibly he knew something you didn't, but his thoughts hastened to other matters. He recalled the day they were married. She was the most lovely bride he had ever seen—well, up to that time, anyhow. After the ceremony he had waited on the steps—old Holy Trinity, if you recollected—to see her come out. It was a spring day—May—and Rittenhouse Square was filled with sunlight and birds. There was a wonderful smell of new green leaves. He would never forget her when she did come out, slim and cool. It made you feel rather sorry for young girls. But then, of course, you were an awful ass at that age.

Exactly, you were! Ancient irritation once stirred by Elsa Sloane and all her immured kind in their immured city assailed your mind with renewed vigor. Yes, he had been an awful ass—Welles. Why sorry for the girl and not just as

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sorry for the bridegroom—Fortescue, or whatever his name was? Wasn't marriage just as terrifying for the man as for the woman? Good Lord! the idea American women of that period had about themselves, and still had, as far as that went! The great gift they thought they made when they consented to bestow their hand on a man! . . . What was Fortescue like?

"Very charming." Welles was a trifle hurt and muffled. How intolerant you were getting, as you got older! Couldn't you wait a little while to hear what had happened to Elsa Sloane? As to Fortescue—one of those dark, quick Englishmen. Welles saw a lot of him since he himself had gone to live in London.

With which, except as a background, you leave Welles for the most part behind. Not that he isn't interesting, for he is; and not that he isn't greatly concerned with this recital, for he is that, too, as you shall see, but as the direct narrator of a story Welles is difficult. To repeat him literally would be to write all broken sentences and stars like the preceding paragraphs. One must take his verbal staccatocisms as a point of departure and beyond that use intuition. Welles is a modern man, and Welles, for the past fifteen years, has lived in England, and as a result, he

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talks elliptically and is much alarmed lest you should think him too explanatory and too imaginative. Poor Welles, it is fairly obvious that his desire to be mentally correct has cut him off from whatever happiness might have been his. . . . And so, gathering up the disassociated allusions that he has let drop about you, you discover, with a little shock of pleasure at your own intelligence, that it was a night in Florence when Elsa Fortescue's story really begins. Up until then it had been all maidenhood—Philadelphia maidenhood at that—and a year of honeymoon. She had had no chance, you see, to realize that life, far from being a silken ribbon, was a tangled skein, very puzzling to unravel.

But before the night there had been an afternoon. There usually is. Fate sets the stage perfectly—or else we set the stage for Fate. Tragedy follows a pin-prick; a headache is the mother of irreconcilable quarrel.

It had been hot; it was late April. In the gardens of the Pitti Palace, back of the apartment Fortescue had taken for the winter, the cypresses silhouetted slender coolness against a cloudless sky. One felt the languor of Italian spring; the lazy relaxation of mind and muscle that follows surrender to embracing sunlight and

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embracing smells distilled by the warmth—the smell of almond-trees, of old walls, of earth turned over these many years, of closed rooms with their shutters at length flung open. Elsa and Fortescue had gone to a tea-party of a Mrs. Williams, an Englishwoman, widow of one of those queer Englishmen who live all their lives in foreign places constantly annoyed by the ways of foreigners; a small, round, plump, gray-haired woman, collector of writers and painters and musicians. Elsa did not like her; Fortescue did. But then, after four o'clock of the afternoon, when he stopped work, Fortescue apparently liked almost every one. He had an avidity for people and gaiety—a grim worker, you understood, and, like most grim workers, an almost faunlike amuser of himself afterward; one of those children of the sun in whose company dusk takes on more romance, lights spin in mystery. But on this particular afternoon, this mood of his, usually to Elsa so baffling but so exciting, found with her little response; rather, the opposite. It had been a bad day; it had started wrong. She had spent the morning lonely and unoccupied, dawdling over a book, writing a letter, pottering over flowers. She had not seen her husband until luncheon, and then he had been in one of those

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abstracted, distant states of mind that were her despair. It was as if she were a creature of another plane. She had been insulted. She had determined that he could not pick her up again in any light and casual manner. Poor Elsa! The growing-pains of the only child of a rich American family, particularly a female child, are acute. There had been too much of this of late; of this absent-mindedness of his. A man's work was all very well, but—! And because Fortescue seemed so blithely unaware of the feelings surging in her breast, her anger had hardened to a settled irritation. The heat irritated her; the thought of Mrs. Williams; the Italian voices passed on the way across the Arno and across the square of the cathedral; even Fortescue's own soft English accents were foreign and distasteful. She was homesick and unamused, tired of meeting people who thought of her only as Raphael Fortescue's wife. She longed for the quiet assurance and the instant prestige of her former life. But as she was very young she did not think all this out clearly, but rather in a vague, troubled way, and as she was very young she did not realize that her hidden anger only added to the luster of her eyes and the color of her cheeks. She was altogether sapphire—her

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eyes, and her light dress, and her hat, and the little sunshade with which impatiently she tapped the sidewalk.

Fortescue, at her elbow, sighed and chuckled and regarded her obliquely with teasing violet eyes.

"How can any one as pretty as you," he said, "be quite so un-get-at-able? You ought to have a little cave up in these Italian hills and be worshiped for your beauty, not your temper. You would like that, wouldn't you?"

As they were at the moment ascending a half-lighted stone stairway, and as they had, the next moment, come to Mrs. Williams's tea-party, Elsa found no opportunity for adequate reply. Recalcitrant, blue hat and blue dress and blue, unfriendly eyes, she was swept up by a crowd of temperamental Swiss and Poles and English and Italians, who inwardly obliterated themselves before this beautiful "American icicle" and pictured themselves as possible future thawers of a frigidity bitterly intriguing. It was not, therefore, until an hour later that she made the discovery that was to be to her so extremely important; the most important discovery of her life.

At the time it did not seem important; she was only a little puzzled, because previously, in

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the few months of their marriage, her husband had never come across an old friend of his without at once dragging him or her off in pursuit of Elsa. He still had the feelings of pride natural to a showman who has caught a rare and beautiful animal in a strange country. But now, apparently, he had overlooked her entirely. His face disclosed as much when, searching him out, she found him sitting on a carved bench in a corner, talking to a woman whom she had never before seen. An orange shaded lamp made a pool of soft light; comparative quiet reigned; to Elsa the corner seemed oddly apart from the rest of the room, these two people she was interrupting very much encompassed in a circle of their own thoughts and words. She experienced a queer little flutter and tightening of the heart, a flutter and tightening she could not account for; as if, a naughty child, she had come into a place where she was not wanted.

Fortescue, arising to his feet, spoke a trifle lamely and absent-mindedly. "My dear," he stammered, "this is the Marchesa di Arcoli—I grew up with her."

"Oh," said Elsa, awkwardly, "so you're English." And then she felt abrupt and school-girlish. She understood that she was showing to a

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disadvantage. She grew angry with herself; a little frightened, too. She realized that she had been showing to a disadvantage all day, and there was something about it malign; something of Nemesis pushing her on to the wrong gesture and the wrong phrase. This was a most finished woman who was holding her hand, at least so it seemed to Elsa's agitated glance—a tall woman dressed in black, but so slim and beautifully made that her height was gracious and not easily discerned. A woman of dark, restless eyes and twisted, red mouth—a lovely, if not altogether pleasant, mouth—and a hint of something pathetic, perhaps, about her finely modeled, fresh-colored cheeks; and, above all, a woman who had evidently known Fortescue intimately for years, for she called him by a nickname and studied Elsa with the delicate analysis with which women greet the new wives of old friends. Now she laughed.

"Yes," she said—she had a sweet, rather husky voice—"English; only Italian by adoption. And I'm so glad to have discovered you two. You must come to see me often. I shall be in Florence all the rest of April and May."

That was all. Not very much. But afterward Elsa and Fortescue had walked home unusually

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silent through streets overlaid with the shadow of tall, windowless buildings and the night, until, obeying the demon of inopportunity that had stood at her elbow all day, Elsa broke the silence. She was not jealous, she told herself; she would have scorned jealousy. As a young and lovely American she believed that once she had given herself to a man, that man, worshipful, attentive, grateful, was irrevocably hers; moreover, she had the calm insolence of youth, and this woman, this old friend of Fortescue's, was at least ten years her senior; but she had, none the less, securely fixed in her mind, the notion that any undue attention, even of the most platonic kind, given by her husband to any one or anything else was an infraction of her own sovereignty. She had felt, a few hours earlier, the same way towards Fortescue's painting.

"Who is this friend—this Marchesa di Arcoli?" she asked, and, although she meant to ask it gently, she asked it with a crispness that was irritating.

Fortescue came back to his immediate surroundings abruptly.

"Her name," he answered, "was Violet Harrington. I knew her years ago in London—then

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she married this Italian. I think she's very unhappy."

Elsa hesitated, chose the wrong posture, and plunged.

"She ought to be."

"What?" Fortescue's voice whistled sharply in the dusk.

"She ought to be."

Fortescue laughed incredulously. "What in God's name do you mean?" he said.

Elsa, trembling inwardly, spoke with the assured cruelty of sudden fear. "Just that. She is either a bad woman, or will be." She hurried on, half unaware of what she was saying, and yet dimly cognizant that she was speaking the truth. This Marchesa di Arcoli was a bad woman; a grasping, selfish, unsatisfied woman. She knew it. What fools men were! Why wouldn't they hear facts? She realized her husband's anger as she blindly finished her speech. "I have no patience with women who make their own beds and then won't lie in them. Oh yes, you think me very young, but I can tell from a woman's face— She has hungry eyes."

For a moment Fortescue was silent, as if struck dumb with amazement at the outrageous words,

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then he spoke in a voice Elsa had never before heard—precisely, coldly, and finally.

"If you don't mind," he said, "you'll leave my friends alone. I made them long before even I knew you."

Her mood of the day passed; she could have sunk down on the pavement and wept. But it was too late, and she recognized the fact. Perhaps for the first time in her heretofore admired life she perceived the irrevocableness of words; their fatal finality.

She walked beside her husband in silence with tightened lips, and, in equal silence, passed through a miserable dinner, where, in the great paneled room in which they dined, the four candles on the table seemed inadequate to hold back the shadows surrounding her and unequal to making clear the figure of Fortescue, strangely nebulous and unfamiliar.

Later she went out onto the balcony that ran the length of the apartment. A great full moon was up. The night was tender and filled with small sounds. She hoped her husband would come to her soon. She was entirely ready to forgive him. Then she heard his step and sank back into the long chair in which she was lying.

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He stood with his back to the moon so that she could not see his face clearly, but she knew his eyes were searching her. The glow of his cigarette illumined from time to time his white shirt-front. Finally he spoke softly.

"What silly asses we are!" he said. "I'm sorry. But you mustn't, sweetheart, say cruel things. It isn't right. What do we know of any one else's life? No one even knows what goodness is. And Violet Harrington is a good woman—an exceptional woman. I know all about her."

So it had been altogether her fault, not his? She, Elsa, had been utterly to blame! Her spirit drew apart a little. Long ago she had realized the folly of her speech of the walk homeward, but had provocation been lacking? At all events, she was not prepared to shoulder entire responsibility. Proud people so thoroughly castigate themselves that further correction seems to them unnecessary. Yes, Fortescue could kiss her; he was doing so now; but— Suddenly he stood back and thrust his hands into his pockets. When he spoke it was in a curious, tired, half-laughing voice.

"Would you mind telling me," he asked, "what I have married?"

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Elsa faltered. "Why—" she began. "Why—I don't understand."

"It's very simple," answered Fortescue, and his words tumbled over one another, as if he was giving rein to thoughts long repressed. "I thought I had married a human being, but it seems I haven't. Oh yes, I know you're young, and I know I may be cruel, but I can't wait all my life for you to grow up. Besides, I don't think you ever will. Your trouble isn't youth; it lies much deeper. You're a narcissan, my dear; in a world of reality you are interested solely in your own reflection. Well—I can't go on wooing you forever, you know. It grows stale. Sometimes you must woo me, too, just a little. Besides, I have a life. Every now and then it would be becoming in you to evince a little interest in it even if you fail to feel it." He turned and disappeared through one of the long windows; Elsa heard his footsteps dying away down the stone-flagged hall within.

She lay looking at the moon through tear-blinded eyes. She was trembling with fatigue and wounded feelings and anger; a new anger. Fortescue's last words had brought an unexpected, stunning confusion into the situation; an unprepared for element. Every ideal carefully cher-

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ished had been outraged; and, crowning injury of all, her husband, the man she had picked out from all the world, had, it seems, suddenly, horribly, chosen to divest himself of the aureole with which she had endowed him. She was disconcerted. What did he mean? What did he want of her? Could he possibly think decent women made open love to men? Why should she—why should they? Hadn't she given him all she had to give—everything? It was unbearable. She felt as if she had been touched by an unknown vulgarity, by a fierceness the presence of which in life she had never before suspected. She was uncomfortable with thoughts she could neither co-ordinate nor interpret. Clocks striking midnight aroused her before she went back into the apartment. . . .

Subsequently, Elsa's first reaction was toward a cool dignity; toward a sweet, hurt, patient frame of mind; toward, that is, the usual baffled feminine attitude, particularly when under the bafflement is a feeling that one is in the wrong. She showed her husband as best she could, without becoming too transparent, that she was waiting, was entirely receptive to the apologies he might wish to make. He wanted that, didn't he? Receptiveness? She was astonished that he seemed

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so oblivious to her attitude. For all one could tell, the quarrel of the moonlit night had passed him by as if it had never occurred. He was altogether his usual amused self, alternately silent and completely absorbed, or gay and adventurous, except that for a week or so, it was true, he had been restless and had spoken of leaving Florence.

"Let's get away," he suggested, irritably. "I'm fed up with Italy. We'll sublease this apartment and go home."

Elsa had the domestic instincts of a cat; household change appalled her.

"But we're just getting really settled," she objected.

"Very well," said Fortescue, with an odd finality.

And so they did not go until the end of May. Later Elsa wished that she had acquiesced in the original plan, for the Marchesa di Arcoli began to assume a position of importance in her life. It had been clear to every one else that this would be the case, but it had not been clear to Elsa. Youth and beauty cannot imagine defeat until the defeat actually has occurred. Youth is insolent; its weapons are clumsy. Elsa became aware of the fact that her husband was seeing a great deal of

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this old friend of his only after all Florence had had at least a week or two in which to smile and nod and grimace, and it was even a week later before she discovered that he was quite willing to see her alone, unsupported by a wife. When she had summoned up enough courage to speak to him about this, it was with a new meekness and uncertainty in her voice. She was beginning to be rather afraid of her husband. Their relationship seemed to have undergone a subtle change; he was exhibiting the "un-get-at-ableness" of which he had accused her. He met her objections with amused tolerance.

"Whatever you may think, my dear," he said, "I have every intention of seeing from time to time an old friend—particularly an old friend who has a particular interest in my work and who is in trouble. I hope some day that you will learn that this is not America."

"Perhaps I shall," she had flashed back at him.

He had stared at her with wide and displeased eyes.

"I don't want to say anything rude," he said, "but I should beware of unpleasant thoughts, if I were you."

Elsa was troubled with the feeling that she was abroad upon unknown and uncharted seas. She

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was very unhappy. She wanted very much to do the right thing, but what the right thing was, she could not discover—again she felt the irrevocableness of words; the inability to take back what has been said, the inability so to frame a sentence that it will convey instantly to one you love that you love him, or her, and wish to forget, to wipe off, all that has occurred.

Two weeks later, however, Fortescue had been neither tolerantly amused nor displeased when, one night, returning late for dinner, he had announced his intention of leaving Florence at once. To the contrary, he had been obviously, although mysteriously, disturbed. To Elsa's newly oversensitive intuitions it seemed, although she chided herself and was shocked at her own imaginings, as if his life were disconcerted with something far too warm for mere friendship. She did not dare allow herself to go further.

"Get ready!" he had said. "I must return to England."

London proved a new world to Elsa. For one thing, she had never before seen her husband in his native land except for the month, just after their marriage, they had spent with his family in the country. She realized him, therefore, more completely and with a new respect. He was an

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important man, a much-sought-after man. The two of them were swept up in a round of engagements. She found England greatly to her liking; there seemed a franker air here than on the Continent; this place, like her own country, was a place of known antecedents and of assured positions. She began to forget completely Poles and Swiss and Italians and uncertain British and even, to some extent, the Marchesa di Arcoli; perhaps she would have been able to forget the last forever, would have been able to delude herself into thinking the whole dark episode in Florence a passing, easily obliterated madness on her husband's part—she was still, you see, so very sure of the ultimate invincibility of her youth and looks—had it not been for the unfinished letter she found in her husband's handwriting on his desk. The letter marked the second momentous period of her life; it also marked, incidentally, the first time in all her life when she really knew what shame was, shame at herself. When the proud fall it is with a tearing and bruising of fiber the softly padded jesuitical cannot imagine.

July had come and gone, but Fortescue, at work upon some portraits, still lingered on in his London studio. The city slumbered restlessly in the

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dusty heat of August. And it was on a blue, arid morning, when a rainless breeze stirred the trees outside the open windows, that Elsa, going to her husband's library for some writing-material, found the letter on his desk.

A sentence caught her eye, and she picked up the closely written sheet and continued to read. Her heart was beating with stifling rapidity; at first she was unaware of the baseness of her act. Her impulse was primitive; it was not until later that she realized, among other things, that the very fact of her husband having left his letters about so openly was proof that her guilt of reading one would be entirely beyond the pale of his comprehension.

"You have asked me," ran the letter, "why I left Florence so hastily. Surely you know? It was because I was afraid of myself. I am no fool or prude about life, but I am an artist, and, as an artist, I know that you cannot destroy beauty and survive as you were before—no, no matter for what moments of unimaginable bliss. You have taught me a knowledge of the beauty of personal relationships of which, before, I was ignorant, and I fled from you lest the crescendo of this would carry us into regions I dare not contemplate. Dreams are better, my dear, unless

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they can be translated into honest action. Dishonesty marks the ending of beauty. For my work I need dreams, but I must be sure never to replace them by anything save clear-eyed reality. Soiled reality is the death of both dreams and dreamer.

"Besides, my situation is not as simple as even the situations of most. I am devoted to my wife; she is very fine even if she is very young, and I cannot desert her and I cannot betray her. Surely I would be a poor sort of man if I were to take her conception of life and distort it into something base, and bring this memory and accusation to you as my first gift. It is not her fault if she cannot give me what I need, or what, I sometimes feel, all creatures must have of happiness. She does her best; I must be content. But sometimes—yes, that cannot be prevented—many times, you will walk and talk with me in my thoughts. You will be the horizon to which always I can compare the things near at hand when they seem so far from the perfection that I believe is dormant in everything. . . . Once a year write me—tell me all that you think, or have done. . . ."

Elsa put down the letter. Her face was white and drawn; her eyes were like lonely pools under

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a parching sun. Very slowly into her whirling brain had been filtering a small stream of ice-cold thought, a vision that she knew would be there always. She had done a shameful thing, she, Elsa Sloane; and—and, strangely enough, this was much more important, although only a few months before it would not have been—she realized this curious change in her point of view, even as she stood there—she was in love, yes, completely, with a man who from now on could give her only part of himself, unless—and even her untrained intuitions knew him too well to imagine such a thing possible—he forgot, or unless a miracle happened, a Paul of Tarsus revelation. She stood with her hands up to her cheeks, staring out of the window at the trees stirred by the rainless breeze.

How strange men were! How strange! That was really a very fine letter of her husband's, and yet he was completely ignorant of the fact that through what he had said in it he was as unfaithful to her as he would have been through some grosser physical manifestation. But the woman to whom he was writing would not be unaware. Oh no! Women are unable to separate their minds and bodies as men do. They know that love is a matter of completeness, or

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else that it is nothing at all. They are not satisfied with half measures.

Afterward she went down-stairs with a new calmness and interviewed her butler about the dinner-party she was giving that night. Only when it was very late on that day—at midnight, after her guests had gone—lying in her bed, was she able to relinquish herself to tears.

It was about this time that Welles reappeared upon the scene. He had been sent to London permanently by the firm for which he was working. Immediately he hunted Elsa out with the soft avidity of the socially inclined bachelor temperament. It was more or less clear that he had always been in love with her in a non-brilliant way, and it was entirely clear that, from this moment on, unless Welles had been Welles and Elsa just what she was, their history might have had a very different ending. A lonely woman, with a desperate thought as her constant companion, is inclined to be reckless, even if she is in love with the man she is hurting. That she talked a great deal to Welles and in detail, goes without saying; she belonged—may still belong, for all that—to the large division of completely honest womenkind who fail to discover any disloyalty, even toward good taste, in the dis-

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closing to an intimate friend of intimate secrets. As a result, there came a warm summer night two years later when, at Fortescue's little place down in Surrey, Elsa's future trembled in the balance. But not for long.

She and Wells had left Fortescue reading in the sitting-room and had gone out through one of the long windows into the perfumed darkness of the garden. The smell of grass and of yew and of a multitude of flowers touched them with invisible fingers. There was no light at all.

"The letter came today," said Elsa.

"You mean—"

"Regularly—every year." She made a sweeping gesture with her arms into the shadows. "It is a big, thick letter, with a coronet. I suppose this will go on until I die."

An overpowering sense of her nearness, and of a new pathetic quality about her, took possession of Welles; he could bear it no longer.

"It will not go on!" he said, between his teeth, and stepped forward.

For a moment she allowed his arms with a trembling uncertainty, then she put them gently away from her. "My poor friend," she said quietly, yet with timid lips, "how very wicked I am becoming." And she turned and walked

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slowly back into the house, leaving Welles astonished at the maturity that seemed to have become part of her.

Once in the house, however, she fled up the stairs. Fortescue had left the sitting-room and she hunted him out in his bedroom where he was standing before the mirror. She paused with her hand on the knob of the door, trying to control the throbbing of her heart.

"Raphael!"

Fortescue half turned about, smiling questioningly at her wide eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Raphael."

"My dear?" His smile grew fixed.

Her thoughts whirled suddenly in the aching confusion of her brain.

"You must love me!" she panted. "You—you must love me!"

His eyebrows went up. "What—" he began, but her self-control deserted her. She gave a little hoarse cry and fell at his knees and embraced them.

"More!" she sobbed. "More! You must love me!"

He had never seen her this way before; he had not imagined her capable of such a scene; he was bewildered and horrified. He drew her

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over to a lounge and sat her down beside him and patted her shoulder, but she slipped away from him and hid her head once more on his knees.

"I cannot go on!" she said.

"With what?" He was unprepared for the broken sentences that tumbled from her lips.

For a long while they remained this way, Fortescue staring straight in front of him, stroking with unheeded hand the bowed head. Finally he spoke with effort.

"I do love you," he said, gently. "I love you greatly, as you should know. I forgive your reading that letter—what difference does it make? I love you and always shall. I love you point for point. All that you give me I return, gift for gift, thought for thought. Isn't that enough? What more can I give or promise?" For a moment he was silent, as if considering deeply his next words. Suddenly he, too, flung out his arms as Elsa had done in the garden an hour before. "Can you not grant me as well," he asked, "a dream or two?"

Elsa did not raise her head for a long instant; then she got to her feet. "Certainly," she said, softly, and kissed him. "Good night. Yes, it

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is all right. Quite all right." She felt much older than he.

She went up to her own room and stood by the open window, staring out into the liquid obscurity of the night. The young air touched her young bare shoulders. So this was the end of youth, was it, and of all her visions? To love all her life a man who in return could love her only lamely! And yet it had been her own fault, she saw that now clearly enough. Or, no, not her fault, but the fault of those before her; the wearisome generations of those before her! Dull! Dull! Dull!—She could not think back so far! How could they expect her to hold, with the starched little precepts they had willed to her, such a man as her husband? How? She had tried to confine quicksilver to a small crystal platter. And now—? Suddenly she leaned forward and gripped the window-sill. Well, she would do that, anyway! She had failed so far, but she would not fail in this essential. If dreams were necessary for her husband he should have them and she would guard them. It would be a fitting immolation for the mistakes she had made. She would clasp the determination to her as a flagellant clasps his crucifix of thorns. . . . But so many years; and she felt

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herself so young! . . . So, you will say, here were two fools with their respective dreams! . . . Possibly. . . .

What, after all, is one to do with dreams—the dream, that is, of a person whom you love when it is a dream which does not include you; a dream that threatens to extinguish you? . . . Live with it, I suppose. Strive to make the best of it and fail to do so; pray, no matter how high your spirit of self-sacrifice was originally, that time will obliterate it and find, as is usually the case, that time does not—hate each 4th of August because on that day comes with unfailing regularity a thick envelope wearing a coronet. . . .

And so, because it has to be done, we skip fourteen years and a multitude of Welles's elusive sentences and come to the spring of 1912 and the Riviera, and the Hôtel Esplanade at Nice. That is, we skip all but a few of Welles's sentences, and these are too significant to skip and are short and, for him, extraordinarily definite. He becomes metaphorical—an unheard-of thing; he reminds you that he has spoken of Elsa Fortescue as always wearing blue—of her turquoise effect, a little hard and brilliant. Well, she got over that. Odd, wasn't it? You somehow never thought of her as being turquoise any

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more, you thought of her, rather, as amethyst—that's the stone, isn't it? Softer, complete in color. . . . Imagine, Welles becoming metaphorical! . . .

It hasn't an esplanade, the Hôtel Esplanade, but it has beautiful gardens, and is on the outside of the town on the edge of a hill where a footpath goes up to a wall that overlooks the valley of the river. It is supposed to be the quietest and most careful hotel in that part of the world, and for these reasons Elsa and Fortescue, and Welles, as an acquiescing third, had picked it out. Fortescue was very much overworked and had been ordered a holiday; Welles had become that most harmless and not unnecessary thing, an ubiquitous bachelor friend. The life of a kindly barnacle is, after all, not a bad one. Unrewarded faithfulness is better than no faithfulness at all.

In the gardens of the Hôtel Esplanade where they narrow into a strip of thick verdure between the buildings and the rising hill beyond, there is a bench of stone, with carved ends and a Medusa head at the back. Over the bench hangs a mimosa-tree, so that you sit in a little circle of shade with the white sunlight just beyond the tips of your shoes. And the bench and the mimosa-tree are just outside the window of the second-

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story sitting-room which for the time being was Fortescues'.

Welles and Elsa—they had just finished luncheon—stood at the window and looked down into the mid-day quiet of the garden. It was so still they saw a lizard creep out of an interstice in the bench, run up the back, over the Medusa head, and down. Fortescue stuck his face in at the door.

"Made up your mind yet," he asked Elsa, "about going to the Grays' tonight for bridge? If so I'll order the motor for half after seven. They're to have a sort of stand-up supper, I believe."

Elsa made a dissenting motion with her hand. "Let's put it off," she begged. "That is, the decision. I'm so lazy; it's—I can't tell yet. About five I'll know how Mrs. Gray's stridencies are going to affect me. There will be a lot of other people, so our coming or not won't make any difference."

"Oh, very well," said Fortescue, irritably, rather as if life had suddenly become unbearable. "I'm off to Mentone. I'll be back in time to dress. By then you'll know." And he slammed the door behind him.

He had grown irritable lately. Great per-

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sonal charm coupled with fame is a devastating combination; one is too much sought after, too much torn between the conflicting passions of work and gregariousness.

"You think he's better?" said Welles.

Elsa sighed. "Oh, lots," she said, and turned back to the window. When she and Welles looked down again into the garden there was a woman sitting on the stone bench. She must have just that moment come out of the hotel.

Welles heard Elsa take a sharp breath and he saw her body stiffen. "Wait!" she commanded suddenly, and laid a hand on Welles's arm, and was gone.

The door closed behind her, and there was an interval of quiet, and then Welles saw her come out below him and go up to the woman on the bench. The latter looked up, but remained sitting an instant longer before she got to her feet. She was a slim, dark woman with a large hat that shaded her face. After awhile she and Elsa walked away into the shadows of a path hidden in wistaria.

Welles went back to a table and picked up a magazine, and began to read. Fortescue, in a motoring coat, passed through the room whis-

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ting. "For God's sake," he said, "wake Elsa up! I can't get her to do anything any more."

"All right," nodded Welles, absently. "Yes, I will."

A clock ticked. Drowsy sunlight crept across the floor. Through the windows came the scent of wistaria. Then, unexpectedly, Elsa was back again, leaning against a table, her hands behind her, staring with unusually brilliant eyes at Welles, who had risen to his feet.

"Take me out for a walk," she said, quickly.

"Who was the woman?" asked Welles.

Elsa made a gesture of dismissal. "No one," she said—"Yes, one of my very oldest friends. I haven't seen her for years. I have asked her to dine with us—to—to surprise Raphael. She is here only for the night—she's motoring down to Italy to join her husband—" A queer little chuckle bubbled up from her as if she had had nothing whatsoever to do with its inception. "Her third husband," she amended.

"Third?" queried Welles.

"Yes, third." Elsa's eyes contracted. "Over here one must live, you know; marry or starve. Come along! I'll introduce you to her at half past seven. Meet me," she said, laying a hand on his arm, "at half past seven at the foot of the stair-

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case where it goes into the lounge. Not a minute later! You understand?"

"Yes," said Welles, "I understand."

But he didn't; nor did he understand any better as the afternoon progressed. They walked down into the town and along the sea front; they had tea in a little café where a red-coated orchestra played waltzes with undue rhythm. Over a cup she was taking from her lips Elsa looked at Welles with a sudden lowering of eyelashes.

"Beautiful eyelashes!" interjects Welles. "Oh, by Jove, beautiful!"

"Tell me," she asked, and her voice was a little unsteady, "do you think cruelty is ever justified?"

Welles felt that he was skirting the confines of the mystery, but his understanding was no clearer than before.

"It depends," he answered; "in some instances it seems unavoidable in this tangled world."

"Yes," she said, "just that! That is the point. An operation, for instance, to cure a secret illness"—she laughed uncertainly—"mental or physical." She suddenly became grave. "But the shock is very great, even in the most necessary of operations, isn't it?" She spread out her hands. "I wonder!"

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In the dusk, she and Welles walked slowly back to the hotel.

"At half past seven!" she said, with a trembling gaiety, and was gone.

In the Hôtel Esplanade the main staircase debouches with a slow curve into a large room where there are many chairs and many little tables, and here people sit before they dine, and here, afterward, they come to sip coffee and to dislike the strangers about them. Just where the staircase ends is a chandelier of draped crystals forming a pool of radiance through which step ladies, hastily or slowly, according to their notion of how on that particular night they look. It is an uncompromising radiance.

At the foot of the staircase, Welles, in a dinner-jacket, waited. He heard a whisper of skirts above him and looked up. Elsa was descending, slowly, a faint, reflective smile on her lips. She had made an unusually brilliant toilette. She was wearing a gown of sapphire and sapphire earrings were in her ears, and her cheeks were flushed and she was carrying her head with the pretty, proud carriage of a woman who knows that at the moment she is beautiful. It came to Welles with a shock he had not experienced for

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years how really beautiful she was. Her thirty-six years had treated her kindly.

"Wait a moment," she whispered, as she passed him, and she went over into the crowd and came back with the tall, dark woman of the afternoon.

"Forgive me," she said, "for bringing you here, but it is the most convenient place to await my husband. Mr. Welles—the Marchesa di"—she corrected herself—"the Principessa di Vitelli," And then Welles knew what was going to happen.

With a sudden flash of intuition he realized that he was at the beginning of a momentous incident, and then he realized that, however uncomfortable such incidents were for a person of his temperament, there was about this particular incident an extreme degree of equity; a stimulating sense of the nearness of the wings of the Eumenides. After fourteen years, Elsa's hour of consummation had arrived, and, more than any one else in the world, he knew what those fourteen years had been to her; knew better, perhaps, than did Elsa herself; knew the dark, unaided struggle, the slow agony, the maimed pride; the gift so constantly held out and, on Fortescue's part, accepted with so many reserva-

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tions. We are to imagine that at this second of time Welles loved Elsa with a sharp clearness that had heretofore been foreign to his inarticulate nature. He admired, too, although he still shrank a little from the prospective expression of it, the precision with which she had made her own the opportunity given by the unexpected turn of the wheel of fate. He looked at the two women standing under the austere light of the chandelier. How clever! Even this particular position Elsa had chosen at the foot of the staircase, where Fortescue, coming down, would be able to see them with distinctness and uninterruptedly. He would be indeed a fool if he did not understand immediately what life meant him to understand; if he did not perceive immediately the difference with which these two women had handled the gifts that were theirs; Elsa—the amethyst Elsa, you understand—cool and sweet and ripening toward a rich maturity, and this other woman—“burnt out,” Welles called her. Life had burned her out. Her dark, lovely eyes were still there, but beyond that she was altogether burned out; only her eyes and a certain unconscious wistfulness, perhaps, with which nature compensates for its injuries were left. And yet, apparently, she was unaware of this, as

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faded beauty is inclined to be; she was altogether self-possessed, imperturbed, possibly a trifle patronizing. This accounted, then, for the ease with which Elsa had set the stage for her duel. The Principessa di Vitelli felt that she was still dealing with an awkward child.

"Raphael," smiled Elsa—she spoke with a quick calmness—"will be down soon. He is always late. So you must go early to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, very early."

"I'm so sorry. But then we were very lucky to run across you as we did. I haven't told Raphael—it will be a complete surprise to him."

"Oh!" The Principessa di Vitelli's dark eyebrows suddenly went up. Welles, watching intently, was aware that into her mind, for the first time, had flashed a tiny suspicion of something untoward. But Elsa's manner was disarming.

"He will be so delighted," she said. "He has been very much overworked lately. That is why we are here. To see an old friend like you will be to him particularly rejuvenating."

"You are very kind," murmured the Principessa di Vitelli.

"No!" Elsa became grave. "No! Your

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rare letters have meant more to him, perhaps, than anything else in the world."

"You mean—?" The dark eyes grew round and a faint color stirred in the Principessa's cheeks.

Elsa laughed ingenuously. "Of course! Why not? We are much more modern now in England, my dear, than we used to be. Why should I object to your letters, when they meant so much to him?" She drew closer to the other woman, her manner friendly, faintly smiling, earnest. "I dare say," she said, "I am as new-fashioned a woman as most, but when it comes to the life of the man I happen to care for, I do not agree with numerous friends of mine. I think it is a woman's work to make a man's life complete, particularly if he happens to be a genius—they say Raphael is—and when, in fact, you yourself are only rather fumbling and stupid. And you see, your letters have done that—have made Raphael's life ever so much completer than it would have been." She hesitated, as if a little confused, then hurried on. "You understand, I know," she said; "I'm sure you feel the same way. Perhaps—" She paused—"perhaps I should even have written you long

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ago telling you this. Should I? I would have made myself clearer."

She was so innocent, so much in earnest, that even Welles found himself for a while puzzled as to her ultimate meaning. The entire lack of misgiving on the part of the Principessa di Vitelli added to this confusion on his part. These might have been two smiling women discussing the most ordinary of things. For a moment he felt that his initial intuition had been incorrect; that for some unknown feminine reason Elsa was conducting an unlooked-for reconciliation. Her next words, however, corrected this impression.

"Raphael," she said, with a curious little licking of her lips, as if they were dry with a hidden fever, "lives more than most men in his dreams. I have noticed at times that it takes a great shock to awaken him to reality."

"That is the way with all of us," said the Principessa, lightly, as if not greatly interested in what threatened to become a philosophical discussion.

"All?"

"Yes."

"No," said Elsa abruptly, "not all. Few, if any, women. Women are more practical. Their dreams bolster their vanity; or they are warm

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dreams, dreams of physical nearness that they may bring true—or, perhaps, may not. Oh no, women dream differently.”

There was for the first time an undercurrent of challenge in her voice, and she apparently realized this, for she turned and looked up the staircase. “Raphael is always so late!” she complained.

But the other woman had at length awakened to some realization that Elsa’s words were not entirely unrehearsed. Beauty, even after it has long faded, is not intuitive. It does not expect defiance; it is too complacent to regard it seriously. Now, however, the dark eyes of the Principessa di Vitelli fastened themselves with a puzzled expression upon Elsa’s averted face.

“He must have been very happy, then,” she said, slowly, and Welles was aware that here was an attempt to make Elsa unmask her intentions more clearly.

Elsa turned toward them. “Who?”

“Your husband.”

Elsa flushed. “Why?”

The other’s dark eyes were regarding her steadily. “One hears that American women alone do not, perhaps, dream the dreams you say

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most women do. They are too intellectual; too—too cool.”

“Ah!” Welles saw the fingers of Elsa’s hands, hanging at her sides, clench themselves. She gave a little laugh and stepped forward. “How odd,” she said, “that over here one knows so little about American women!” He feared that the moment he had dreaded was about to emerge. “How very odd! Perhaps the only difference between them and others is that their dreams are a trifle kinder; a little—” She stopped abruptly and stared over the other woman’s shoulder, as if, in some cold and absent-minded way, a thought had occurred to her which troubled her and made her uncertain. “It seems,” she said, “that I must tell you more, since you ask—” She stopped abruptly again. “He lives on dreams,” she concluded, lamely, but as if talking to herself.

Then, according to Welles, a strange thing happened, a physical change seemed to come over her; a certain shining precision that had been hers receded from her like a cloak of air made visible; she shrank into herself, and her eyelashes dropped. She turned to him.

“I am very ill,” she stammered in a small, hopeless voice. “Take me away please. No!” She summoned back her strength. “First stop

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Raphael! Quick! He mustn't come this way!"

But Welles did not move. "I will wait," he said. He had plenty of time to stop Raphael. He cast an eye up the empty staircase.

Elsa turned back to the woman beside her. "You must forgive me," she begged. "I do not know what is the matter—I—I am not myself. I—"

The Principessa's red lips twisted into the faintest of ironic smiles. By some convolution of fortune she did not comprehend she found herself unexpectedly in control of the situation.

"Of course," she said. "Naturally! I am so sorry." Her sympathetic tones failed to conceal a gentle amusement, a well-bred note of interrogation.

Elsa turned upon her, the shining precision reborn for a fleeting moment. Welles, standing there, knew what she wanted to say: "You fool! You poor wretched fool! If you are in doubt—look in your mirror and you will see. Do you think God lets people off scot free?" But instead she murmured: "It is very good of you. Perhaps you will understand."

She took Welles's arm and went slowly up the stairs. She walked as if she was very tired and the color had left her cheeks and her eyes.

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Welles, looking back, saw the Principessa di Vitelli still watching them, the same faint amused smile on her lips. He was very angry. So she did not understand, after all! She still thought Elsa was afraid of her as she had been for these last twelve years.

He turned toward Elsa. "Are you feeling better?" he asked.

She did not answer him directly. "You must get hold of Raphael," she said, "and tell him that I have changed my mind; that we will go on to the Grays', after all."

"The Grays! Why, I thought you were ill?"

"I am, but can I leave him here, about this hotel? Hurry!" She raised her head with a desperate little laugh. "It's a pity, too," she said. "Raphael hates me so when I'm not as pretty as he thinks I should be." . . .

You are never quite sure when one of Welles's stories ends. You have been, you see, so preoccupied with your own ideas, so engrossed in the building up of the tale from the disjointed material vouchsafed you—on the surface, Welles, you understand, tells you practically nothing. Besides, he has a trick of rumbling on expletively and breathing rather heavily through his nose long after actual sentences have ceased to come.

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It is almost like awakening from a trance to find him knocking out his pipe.

"They're so queer," he complains.

"Who?"

"Women. So damned silly and so wonderful."

"Of course." You're not in for an argument of this sort. "She saved his dreams, though, didn't she?"

"Oh yes!" Welles takes no particular interest.

"Well, it was a far cry from Philadelphia, anyway."

Welles lights a cigarette.

"Rather!"

THE BLOOD-RED ONE

It was a February evening, so it seems, about five o'clock, and old Mr. Vandusen having left his hat and ulster in the coatroom, had retraced his steps along the entrance hall of the St. Dunstan Club to the wide doorway that led into the first-floor library. He usually sought the library at this time of day; a little group of men, all of whom he knew well, were as a rule to be found there, and they were friendly, not overly argumentative, restful. Now he paused between the heavy portières, partly drawn aside, and peered for a moment into the room. The light from the hall behind him made a pool of faint illumination at his feet, but beyond that there was only a brown darkness, scented with the smell of books in leather bindings, in which the figures of several men, sprawled out in big chairs before the window, were faintly visible. The window itself, a square of blank fog-blurred dusk, served merely to heighten the obscurity. Mr. Vandusen, a small, plump shadow in the surrounding shadows, found an unoccupied chair and sank into it silently.

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"And that's just it," said Maury suddenly, and as if he was picking up the threads of a conversation dropped but a moment before; "and that's just the point"—and his usually gentle voice was heavy with a didacticism unlike itself—"that affects most deeply a man of my temperament and generation. Nemesis—fate—whatever you choose to call it. The fear that perhaps it doesn't exist at all. That there is no such thing; or worse yet, that in some strange, monstrous way man has made himself master of it—has no longer to fear it. And man isn't fit to be altogether master of anything as yet; he's still too much half devil, half ape. There's this damned choked feeling that the world's at loose ends. I don't know how to put it—as if, that is, we, with all the devilish new knowledge we've acquired within the past fifty years, the devilish new machines we've invented, have all at once become stronger than God; taken the final power out of the hands of the authority, whatever it is, toward which we used to look for a reckoning and balancing in the end, no matter what agony might lie between. Perhaps it's all right—I don't know. But it's an upsetting conclusion to ask a man of my generation offhandedly to accept. I was brought up—we all were—to believe in an ordered, if obscure,

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philosophical doctrine that evil inevitably finds its own punishment, and now—!"

"But—" began Tomlinson.

Maury interrupted him. "Yes, yes," he said, "I know all that; I know what you are going to say. I am perfectly aware of the fact that the ways of Nemesis are supposed to be slow ways—exceedingly. I am aware of the fact that in the Christian doctrine the process is not usually completed until after death, but nowadays things are different. How, since all else moves so swiftly, can a just God afford any longer to be patient? Time has been obliterated in the last four years; space and centuries telescoped; the sufferings of a century compressed into a few cycles of months. No, there is something wrong, some break in the rhythm of the universe, or those grotesque ghouls who started the whole thing, those full-bodied, cold-blooded hangmen, who for forty years have been sitting back planning the future of men and women as they planned the cards of their sniggering skat games, would awake to a sun dripping blood." He paused for a moment. "And as for that psychiatric cripple, their mouthpiece," he concluded sombrely, "that maimed man who broods over battle-fields, he would find a creeping horror in his brain like death made visible."

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"And you think he will not?" . . .

In the darkness Mr. Vandusen suddenly sat up very straight and tried to pierce with his eyes the shadows to the right of him.

Again the chair creaked.

"And you think he will not?" asked the voice again.

The words fell one by one into the silence, like stones dropped into a pool by a precise hand. As the ripples of sound they created died away in the brown dusk, the room seemed for a moment to hold a hushed expectation that made ordinary quiet a matter of movement and sound. From the drab street outside the voice of a news-boy, strident and insistent, put a further edge to the sharp minute. "N'extra!" he shouted. "N'extra! 'Nother big raid on west'n front!"

It was Torrance who asked the question. "What—" he said. "But, but—why—!" And then his wheezing inarticulateness broke like a dislocated bellows.

Mr. Vandusen, leaning forward in his chair, did not realize at the time the unreasonableness of the sharp blaze of irritation that at the interruption burned within him. It was not until much later, indeed, that he realized other odd circumstances as well: Torrance's broken amazement,

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the silence of Maury, and Wheeler, and, above all, of Tomlinson. At the moment he realized nothing, except an intense curiosity to hear what the man who had just sat down next to him had to say. "An extraordinary voice! Altogether extraordinary! Like a bell, that is, if a bell could by any chance give a sense of an underlying humor." And yet, even considering all this, when one is old and has heard so many voices—But here he was quite rigid in the darkness. "Do be quiet!" he whispered sharply. "Can't we be quiet!"

"Thanks!" said the voice, with its cool, assured inflections. "There is nothing so very extraordinary to tell. Men's brains are not unlike. Merely—shall I go on?"

And before Mr. Vandusen's hurried assent could be uttered, the quiet tones assumed the accents of narration. "Good," they said. "Very well, then. But first I must ask of you a large use of your imagination. I must ask you, for instance, to imagine a scene so utterly unlike this February night that your eyes will have to close themselves entirely to the present and open only to my words. I must ask you to imagine a beech forest in early November; a beech forest dreaming beneath the still magic of warm, hazy days;

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days that come before the first sharp cold of winter. Will you imagine that?"

"Yes!" murmured Mr. Vandusen; and he noticed that the other men did not answer at all.

"The mild sunlight," continued the voice, "filters through the naked boughs and touches the smooth silver trunks and the moss about their feet with a misty gold as iridescent as the wings of dragonflies. And as far as you can see on every side stretch these silver boles, dusted with sunlight; in straight lines, in oblique columns, until the eye loses itself in the argent shadows of the distance.

"In the hidden open places, where the grass is still green toward its roots, wild swine come out of the woods and stare with small red eyes; but save for the crackling of the twigs beneath their feet it is very quiet. Marvellously so. Quiet with the final hush of summer. Only rarely a breeze stirs the legions of the heaped-up gray leaves, and sometimes, but rarely, one hears far off the chattering of a squirrel. So!—that is my forest.

"Through it runs like a purple ribbon a smooth, well-kept road. And it, too, adds to the impression of stillness, as the untenanted handiwork of man always does. On the rolled,

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damp surface are the marks of the cloven feet of the swine.

"Now, there is a snapping of dead wood, a rustling of leaves, and an immense tusker—a grizzled leader of a herd—comes ponderously through the sun-dappled aisles to the edge of the road. For a moment he stands there, secure and unperturbed, and then suddenly he throws up his head, his little eyes wide and startled, and, wheeling, charges back to where his satellites are browsing. There is a breathless scurrying of huge bodies; then utter silence again, except that far away a limb cracks. But only for a moment is the road deserted. It seems as if the shadow of the great tusker was still upon it when, beyond the bend, a horn, sweet as a hunting-horn, blows once, twice, ends in a fanfare of treble notes, and a long, gray motor-car sweeps into view, cutting the sunlight and the pooled shadow with its twinkling prow. Behind it is another, and another, and another, until six in all are in sight; and as they flash past one has a glimpse, on the seats of the landaulets, of a number of men in long cloaks and helmets; big and little men; fat men and sharp-featured; elderly men and young men, and particularly of one man, in the second car from the front, who looks straight ahead of

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him and is not interested in the chatter of his companions. He is a stern man, rather terrible, and his face wears a curious pallor. On the crest of a wooded slope, a quarter of a mile away, the giant boar sniffs the odor of the gasolene and delicately wrinkles his nose.

"And this," said the voice, "this convoy of motor-cars, these horns, almost as gay as the hunting-horns of former days, was, as you have guessed, The Maimed Man—as you choose to call him—come back to a hunting-lodge to rest. To slip from his shoulders for a while, if he could, the sodden cloak he had been wearing for the past three years and as many months.

"It was dark when they came to the hunting-lodge, a long, two-storied building of white plaster and timber-work above. The sun had been gone a while beyond the low hills to the west, and in the open place where the house stood only a remnant of the red dust of the sunset still floated in the pellucid air. Here the beeches gave way to solid ranks of pines and firs, and the evening sweetness of these fell upon the senses like the touch of cool water upon tired eyes. The headlights of the motor-cars cut wide arcs of blinding light in the gathering darkness. One by one the cars stopped before the entrance with throbbing

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engines and discharged their loads. The short flight of stairs became for a few minutes a swaying tableau of gray cloaks. There was a subdued ringing of spurs. The lamps from within the doorway touched the tips of the helmets so that they twinkled like little stars.

"The Maimed Man descended slowly and passed between his waiting suite. The scent of the pines had stirred his heart with memories. He was thinking of the last time he had been here, years before—well, not really so many years before, only four years, and yet it seemed like a recollection of his boyhood. He paused inside the threshold to remove his cloak. A hand, with a curious lack of duplication to it, stretched itself forward. The Maimed Man turned abruptly to see a servant with one arm bowing toward him. For a moment he paused and then:

" 'You are wounded?' he asked, and although nothing was further from his desire, his voice had in it a little rasping sound; anger it seemed, although it might very well have been fear.

"The man turned a brick-red. He had never quite been able to recover from the feeling that in some way to be crippled was a shameful thing. He had been very strong before.

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"'At Liége, your Majesty,' he murmured. 'In the first year.'

"'Always the left arm,' said The Maimed Man. 'Always the left. It seems always so.' But now he was angry. He turned to one of his suite. 'Can I not escape such things even here?' he asked. He went up without further words to his rooms. From his study a long door of glass opened onto a balcony. He remembered the balcony well. He opened the door and stepped out. The twilight had gone now. The night was very still and touched with a hint of crispness. Stars were beginning to show themselves. The black pines that came down to the edge of the clearing were like a great hidden army."

There was a little pause.

"And so," said the voice, "I can come now almost at once to the first of the two incidents I wish to tell you. I choose only two because there is no need of more. Two will do. And I shall call the first 'The story of the leaves that marched.'

"The warm days still held, and at the hunting-lodge there was much planning to keep things moving and every one busy and content. But secret planning, you understand. The Maimed Man is not an easy person for whom to plan

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unless he thinks that he has the final decision himself. There were rides and drives and picnics and, in the afternoons, usually a long walk, in which the older and stouter members of the suite either stayed at home or else followed painfully in the rear of their more active companions. The Maimed Man is a difficult person to keep up with; he walks very fast across country, swinging his stick, choosing, it would seem, the roughest ways. It is almost as if he wished to rid himself of others; and he is inordinately proud of his own activity. It was a curious sight to see his straggling attendants, spread out through the silver vistas of the beeches, like earnest trolls, all in one way or another bent upon a common end. And I suppose it was on account of this trick of The Maimed Man that one afternoon, toward dusk, he found himself completely alone, save for a silent huntsman in gray who strode on ahead with the quiet, alert step of a wild animal.

"It was very still. There was no breeze at all. Not a sound except the sound of the dead leaves beneath their feet; and The Maimed Man was not, as was his usual wont, talking. Indeed, he seemed very preoccupied, almost morosely so. Every now and then he cut with his stick at a bush or a yellowed fern as he passed. Presently

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the trees opened upon a little glade swimming in sunlight. And then there was a brook to cross, and beyond that a gentle slope before the trees began again. The sunlight was pleasantly warm after the coolness of the forest, and the slope, with its soft dried grass, seemed an inviting place to rest. The Maimed Man continued until he had reached the farther belt of trees, and then he turned about and faced the sinking sun, that by now was changing itself into a nebulous radiance on the horizon. The forest stretched in a gentle billows as far as the eye could see.

“‘We will stop here,’ said The Maimed Man, ‘until the others catch up. Lazybones! If they had one-half the work to do that my poorest man has to the south they would not lose their legs so readily.’ Then he sat down and lit a cigarette. Farther up on the slope, in the shadow of the trees, sat the huntsman. The sun burned away its quivering aura and began to sink blood-red below the hills. Long shadows fell, penetrated with the dancing flecks of twilight.

“‘Here they come!’ said The Maimed Man suddenly. ‘I see gray moving. There—below there, amongst the trees!’ He pointed with his cane. Far back in the secret aisles of the forest across the brook there did indeed seem to be a

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movement. The Maimed Man half arose to his feet. 'I will shame them, the lazybones,' he said, and then he sat down again, with an odd, soft collapse.

"For, you see, it was very still, as I have said. Not a trace of wind. The forest seemed to be slumbering. And yet there had come out of it, and across the open place, and up the slope, so that it touched the hair and chilled the cheek, something that was not wind and yet was like it. A little clammy cat's paw. So! And then was gone. And on its heels came the leaves. Yes, millions of them. But not blown; not hurriedly. Very hesitatingly; as if by their own volition. One might have said that they oozed with a monstrous slowness out from between the crepuscular tree-trunks and across the open space toward the brook. Gray leaves, creeping forward with a curious dogged languor. And when they came to the brook they paused on its farther edge and stopped, and the ones behind came pushing up to them. And looking down upon them, they might have been the backs of wounded men in gray, dragging themselves on their knees to water. . . .

"I don't know how long this moment lasted—minutes perhaps; perhaps no longer than the

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drawing in and letting out of a breath. It was broken by the figure of a man—an upstanding man, this time—who stepped out of the forest opposite and, halting for a moment on the edge of the clearing, looked up to where The Maimed Man was sitting. Then he signalled to some one behind him, and presently one by one the figures of the belated suite appeared. They formed themselves in a little group and with some precision marched across the clearing. As they trampled upon the stricken leaves by the brookside the fixed stare in The Maimed Man's eyes faded, and he watched them with a rigid attention. Shortly they came to where he had got to his feet. A huge elderly man with a red face led them.

“‘But your Majesty,’ he objected, ‘it is not fitting. You should not leave us in this way. Even here, is it altogether safe?’

“The Maimed Man did not answer. Covertly and with a sly shamefacedness, unlike himself, he was trying to read the expression in the huntsman's face. But that faithful fellow's eyes were bland. There was no sign that he had seen anything out of the ordinary.

“There is no need,” said the voice, “for delay.

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From this to the second incident I would describe to you is only a step. I shall not go into details. For these I can safely trust to your imaginations. And yet I would not, of course, have you gather that what I have just told you is without background—was out of a clear sky. Naturally, it was not; it was a cumulation, an apex. Such things do not happen altogether suddenly. There is a nibbling away at the banks, a little rivulet here and there, and then, all at once, a torrent like a haunted river under the moon. I called the first apex 'The story of the leaves that marched'; I shall call the second 'The mist that came up suddenly.'

"Two weeks had passed; quiet days, slow weeks, quiet and slow as the sunlight through the trees. The two doctors at the hunting-lodge, round, sharp-spoken men, with big, near-sighted spectacles, rubbed their hands together and nodded with certainty when they held their daily consultations. 'He is improving rapidly,' they said. 'The lines in his face are going. A little more exercise, a little more diversion—so!' They imagined crosses on their chests.

"Have you ever known mist on a moonlight night in a forest? Not a woods, not an open country with timber scattered through it, but a

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real forest; so limitless, so close-pressing, that one has the same sense of diminished personality and at the same time the same sense of all obstructions cleared away between oneself and the loneliness of the universe that one has at sea. As if, that is, you found yourself, a mere shadow in the darkness, kneeling close before an altar on which blazed, so that you could not altogether raise your head, the magnificence of a star. But mist in a moonlight forest is even more disembodying than mist on a moonlight sea. There are the dark masses of the trees, showing every now and then above the changing wraiths of white, and the summits of half-seen hills, to give an impression of a horizon near yet seemingly unattainable.

"They had finished supper in the great oak-ceilinged room down below, where a fire burned in the stone embrasure, and the soft lights of candles in silver candelabra made only more tenebrious the darkness overhead. The Maimed Man leaned back in his chair and peered with narrowed eyelids through the smoke of his cigar at the long table stretching away from him. For a moment he felt reassured; a hint of the old assurance that had once been one of his greatest gifts. It was partly a physical thing, stirring in

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his veins like the cool blood that follows the awakening from healthy sleep. The sight of all these friends of his, these followers of his, with their keen, sunburnt faces, or their wrinkled and wise ones—! Surely he occupied a position almost unassailable; almost as unassailable as that of the God of Force whose purposes of late had at times puzzled him in a new and disturbing way—. What nonsense! He gripped power as securely as he could grip, if he wished, his sword. What strength in heaven or earth could break a man's will, provided that will had been sufficiently trained? He felt pleasantly tired from the walk of the afternoon; he thought that he would go up to his rooms for a while, perhaps write a personal letter or two, afterward come down again for a game of cards. He stood up; the long double lines of men at the table rose with him, as a unit, at attention. The Maimed Man looked at them for a prolonged second, his heart stirring with pride; then he wheeled about and departed.

"In his workroom above, two secretaries were writing at a table under the rays of a green-shaded lamp. They jumped to their feet as he entered, but he waved them aside.

"'I shall return in a moment,' he said. 'First I wish to finish my cigar.'

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"He opened the glass door onto the balcony, but, as it was cool, he stepped back and asked for his military cloak. When this was adjusted, he stepped once more into the moonlight. . . . And then, suddenly, there was no moonlight at all, or just the faintest glimmer of it, like light seen through milky water. Instead, he had stepped into a swirling vapor that in an instant lost him completely from the door he had just left; a maelstrom of fog, that choked him, half blinded him, twisted about him like wet, coiling ropes, and in a dreadful moment he saw that through the fog were thrust out toward him arms of a famine thinness, the extended fingers of which groped at his throat, were obliterated by the fog, groped once more with a searching intentness.

"'God!' said The Maimed Man. 'God!'—and fought drunkenly for the wall behind him. His hands touched nothing. He did not even know in which direction the wall lay. He dreaded to move, for it seemed as if there was no longer a railing to save him from falling. There was no solidity anywhere. The world had become a thing of hideous flux, unstable as when first it was made. Gelid fingers, farther reaching than the rest, touched the back of his neck. He gave a hoarse, strangled cry and reeled forward, and

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fell across the balustrade that came up out of the mist to meet him. And then slowly the mist retreated; down from the balcony and across the open place beneath. A narrow line of dew-brightened grass appeared and grew wider. The tops of the trees began to show. But The Maimed Man could not take his eyes off the mist, for it seemed to him that the open place was filled with the despairing arms of women and of children, and that through the shifting whiteness gleamed the whiteness of their faces. Behind him was the warm glow of the room, shining through the glass doors. But he did not dare go in as yet; it was necessary first to control the little flecks of foam that despite his endeavor still wet his lips.

"For you see," said the voice, and in the darkness its accents took on a slow, rhythmical sombreness, like the swish of a sword in a shuttered room, "this was far worse than leaves. For, after all, the dead are only the dead, but to the living there is no end."

At least a minute—fully a minute—must have passed, a minute in which the brown shadows of the library, held back for now this long while by the weaving magic of the voice, stepped forward once more into their places, while Mr. Vandusen waited for the voice to continue. Then the spell

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broke like a shattered globe, and, with a sudden realization of many things, he leaned forward and felt the chair to the right of him. There was no one there. He paused with his hand still on the leather seat. "Would you mind telling me," he asked, and he found that he was speaking with some effort and with great precision, "if any of you know the gentleman who has just left?"

"Left?" said Tomlinson sharply.

"Yes—left."

Tomlinson's voice was incredulous. "But he couldn't have left," he insisted. "From where I am sitting I would have seen him as he reached the door. Although, if he really is gone, I can say, thank the Lord, that I think he's a faker."

On silent feet young Wheeler had departed for the hall. Now he returned. "It may interest you to know," he said, "that I have just interviewed the doorman and the boy who is stationed at the steps leading back, and they both say no one has come in or out in the last half-hour."

Suddenly his careful voice rose to a high note. "What the devil—" he sputtered. He strode over to the electric switch. "For Heaven's sake, let's have some light," he said. "Why do we always insist upon sitting in this confounded darkness?"

"BALLY OLD" KNOTT

As for Knott, there was never the slightest reason why I should have known him as well as I did. Our intimacy, I am forced to conclude, was due to Renshaw's lack of social responsibility and his unforgivable habit of throwing, in order not to be bored himself, uncongenial people together. Renshaw was a social Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of those who for the first ten minutes of conversation beguiled him, but who, the ten minutes being up, he realized would prove merely tiresome and hampering. He was not, as you can see, altogether a satisfactory person with whom to share an apartment in a strange city. Even a tender conscience grows weary after awhile of having dropped before it stray Teutonic students, and dissolute Polish musicians, and restless fellow countrymen, like mice who have served the recreational purposes of an attractive cat. And Renshaw, through his wealth, and his apprenticeship to the violin, and his letters, and, when so he wished it, his manners, was by way of collecting numerous victims. He found them in the musical studios which he frequented; they

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crossed his path in the drawing-rooms of the noble and wealthy.

"Let me in!" commanded Renshaw from the hallway. "I've forgotten my key."

I was annoyed; Renshaw was always forgetting his key. Besides, I was very comfortable; the lamps were lit, the big porcelain stove in the corner was burning famously, the curtains were drawn, shutting out the gray and dreary fog that, with the coming of winter, blows down from the Alps upon the shivering city of Munich; altogether, I had been hoping that Renshaw wouldn't appear until, anyhow, just in time for dinner.

I opened the door. He entered with the alert, gay, detached manner that I knew, only too well, indicated a companion of whom he wished to be rid. "Mr. Knott!" he announced, waving a hand toward the doorway. "Mr. John Balliol Hugesson Knott!" A bulky figure emerged from the shadows of the hall. "John 'Bally Old' Knott," continued Renshaw with bland impertinence, "of London and the world! Musician—social delight—drinker of tea! Tea, Knott?"

"Tea?" answered a high and fluting and very south of England voice. "Tea? Oh, thanks, awfully!" And Mr. Knott proceeded to rid himself of the impedimenta that encumbered him.

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Now, most people either remove their street clothing all at once and in something of a bustle, or else at absent-minded intervals punctuated by sentences of greeting, but evidently Mr. Knott belonged to neither of these classes. One suspected him of concentrating burningly on details. First there was a large umbrella to be placed with meticulous care in one corner of the room, and a pair of overshoes, the taking off of which involved many and separate movements and much thought, to be placed beside it; then there were gloves to be removed, finger by finger, and laid with mathematical precision in the crease of a soft brown hat; and finally there was a heavy ulster to be wriggled out of and a silk muffler, of extraordinary length and gaudy color, to be unwound from about the neck. Mr. Knott performed these rites in silence. When he was through he sighed, as a man will when a bit of difficult work is satisfactorily accomplished, and, turning about, bore down on me.

He was a middle-sized man, inclined to portliness, who gave one not the slightest sense of physical strength. Excellent clothes, worn in rather a haphazard manner, covered a figure that might with justice have been described as a series of badly joined ellipses; oval shoulders fell away

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into oval arms that at the elbow joined oval fore-arms; an oval body met oval legs; all oval, except that just below the watch-chain, and at variance to the preponderating elliptical contours, there obtruded itself an inconspicuous but perfectly round stomach; a sleek, compact, easily managed stomach; a stomach that added to a certain air of physical incoherence, an effect heightened by Mr. Knott's head which, in vivid contrast to the vagaries of the rest of him, was spare and essentially worldly. The texture of the skin was weather-beaten but well-tended, and the large, gray, inquisitive eyes were not without distinction; a short mustache, ending in blunt, waxed ends, gave a touch of cosmopolitanism and fatuity combined such as mustaches of the kind always do give.

"How d'y'dol!" said Mr. Knott in his high and fluting voice. "How very jolly all this is." The lamp, shining upon him from behind, turned the sparse, silky hair on top of his head into the most ridiculous of halos. "You and Renshaw live together, don't you? How very nice. I know lots of Americans. I'm—" His voice possessed a breathless quality, as if there was so much to say that it could never possibly get itself said.

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"Knott," interrupted Renshaw sternly, "hush! Have a cigarette!" With the end of the tin box containing the cigarettes, he gently pushed his visitor backward until the rear of the ovoid legs met the edge of a chair and enforced collapse. Unperturbed, Knott continued to survey the room.

"You haven't a piano!" he ejaculated. "Dear me! How very odd! And Renshaw is a musician, too! I'm a musician. That's why I and my family never can agree. Very stodgy English people. I've written half an act of an opera, but somehow I never seem to get it finished. What very dreadful cigarettes!"

Renshaw thrust a cup of tea into an outstretched plump hand. For a moment there was silence, then the breathless fluting voice began again.

"Your friend Renshaw," it observed, "was kind enough to ask me in to dinner to-night. Immediately afterward, so he says, he has to meet a violinist, or something of the sort; I'm afraid, therefore, you'll have me on your hands. You don't mind, do you? No. We might go to a little café afterward, or the theatre—Not music! No, anything but music. I can't bear to hear even my own, except very occasionally. I'm very

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sensitive about music. Marmalade? Thanks." The plump hands were folded across the small stomach. "We'll get along very nicely, I think, don't you?"

"Splendidly," I agreed, and I trust my accents were not too bitter.

Before he departed Renshaw found time to say a few words to me in private. "You'll like Knott," he said, "he's always so ready to do anything. Very obliging. He'll be around here now for a while every other day or so."

He was; only frequently it was every day.

I awoke to a quiet student existence completely altered and in a manner I had never anticipated. I found myself all at once a participator in teas, a frequenter of drawing-rooms, a meeter of endless people. We revelled, I think, I might say without exaggeration, in countesses, in baronesses, in untitled but distinguished Fraus. In the intervals between these we cultivated our hours by visits to the households of famous artists. There were aged countesses who lived in tiny apartments at the top of gloomy palaces, and who peered, over frail hands locked above canes, at Knott's disjointed gayety and my silence, like ancient eagles whose nests have been disturbed by jackdaws; there were young countesses who

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talked German and English and, sometimes, even American slang, and dispensed tea in the most approved fashion; and there were artists who carried the delicate lamp of beauty in bearded and thunderous personalities that almost totally concealed it.

Once or twice I struggled feebly to exert my will against this bolster-like portent that was threatening to smother it. Knott merely waved a dismissing hand. "Shyness," he decided. "Mere shyness. I'll call for you again on Wednesday."

And I do not know to what heights of bachelor popularity we might have risen before the winter was over had it not been for Carnival and Jenny Buel.

Jenny wrecked our masculine routine. They do—women, that is; and, what is more, seem sublimely unconscious of the havoc they have created. I resent Jenny, just as at the time I resented her. She was and is interrupting. And yet it is a deplorable fact that a man by himself is likely to be only half a drama, while, let a woman enter, and there's a chance of his being five acts and an epilogue. Jenny, when we first saw her, looked like a prologue.

Rather wearily Knott had led me through the saturnalia of dances and confetti and spiced

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sausage that go to make up a south German festival. He had lived through a couple of previous carnivals, but was compelled, so it seemed, to live through another because of his sense of duty toward me. But I was not bored; your first carnival is not boring, although I doubt if it is necessary to see more than one. At the end there is left a little too much the impression of roses and perfume struggling for the mastery of an atmosphere soaked with the smell of beer and stale champagne. It was on the night of the final day, the night when everybody puts on fancy costume and King Carnival is buried and only the most adventurous young women are about at all, and then, as a rule, carefully masked, that Jenny appeared.

Renshaw and Knott and I sat in a small side room of the Café Luitpold, a trifle removed from the blaring orchestra and the indescribable hubbub of the main restaurant. Our particular room masqueraded by means of green latticework and purple papier-mâché grapes as an arbor. Mirrors back of the latticework and mirrors overhead made everything very glittering and pleasant. Renshaw, with a clown's costume on and his false face removed and his hair extremely sleek, looked like a handsome and arrogant boy, and Knott,

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who had also removed his false face but kept it by him in view of the highly improbable event of seeing some one he knew, was also unseasonably clean and entirely unaware of the contrast between the solemnity of his countenance and the levity of his dress. He ate the wing of a cold chicken with care, in the midst of which operation he suddenly paused, the chicken wing still suspended before his mouth, and stared in the direction of the entrance to the arbor. I turned my head. For a moment I had a confused impression of a bouquet of violet and white; violet and white reflected from the mirrors overhead and the mirrors all about us; and then the bouquet resolved itself into six pierrots arm in arm with six pierrettes, the twelve of them evidently seeking a place to sit down. The beauty of their costumes, the grace with which they were worn, put to shame the amusing or tawdry disguises of the rest of us. But even more arresting was the small pierrette, somewhere near the middle of the column, who hung upon the arm of a huge escort, and without the semblance of a mask looked about her with frankly interested eyes—she was so fresh and sparkling, and, in this place, so unexpected.

For a moment the three of us stared, and then

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Renshaw half arose from his chair. "By Jove!" he said, and he said it very loudly and in English. "By Jove, that's the first really pretty girl I've seen!"

A section of the passing column hesitated, there was a swirl of skirts, and the small pierrette in question stood before us.

"Jenny Buel thanks you, sir!" she said, and courtesied. And her speech was sweet and familiar, and very much through her nose.

Renshaw, still on his feet, choked.

"Indiana!" he ejaculated.

"No," said Jenny Buel, "Iowa"; and added, with demure impertinence, "Do you mind?"

"Mind?" Renshaw waved an embarrassed hand. "Not in the least—not in the least!"

"Oh, do sit down!" admonished Knott, who, to all outward appearances, was the only one of the group entirely unmoved. "Sit down—and then your countrywoman will join us, and we'll all have supper together. Miss Buel?"

Jenny's brows knit in perplexed thought. "I don't think I can," she reflected. "You see, my friend over there is a Swedish painter, and he's very hot-tempered, and—good gracious, here he comes now!"

The gigantic pîerrot bore down upon us.

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"He only speaks, besides his own language, German, and that not very well," said Jenny. She had the whitest and prettiest slim wrist and arm.

"Then," said Knott, with sudden inspiration, "we'll pretend we don't understand a word of it. That will save us a lot of bother."

He turned wide and friendly eyes upon the indignant northerner, who by now was leaning across the table addressing us in tumbling gutturals.

"What's he saying, Miss Buel?" he asked mildly.

"He says," Jenny translated, and without a flicker of humor, although she must have suspected that Knott, at least, spoke German, "he says that you have insulted him, and he says that he will pick the three of you up and throw you out of the restaurant. He is very strong," she added.

"He doesn't mean it," said Knott. "Tell him to go away. He'll go. All Swedes are like that."

"You think so?" said Jenny.

"I know so," said Knott.

Jenny transformed herself into a Fury. She advanced upon her huge admirer, stamped her

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foot, addressed him in fluent German, and advised him never to speak to her again. As he departed, crestfallen, she warned him not to be late for an engagement she had with him the following day. Then she sat down between Renshaw and myself, and opposite Knott, and with a sigh, smoothed out her short skirt of violet and white silk.

"Gee!" she said, "it's good to be with human beings again."

One might have said that for a prolonged moment Knott continued to regard this latest addition to our table sombrely, if sombre is an adjective that could be applied to his round and prominent eyes. When he recovered from this mood he abruptly asked a question—a series of questions—totally at variance with his usual attitude of bored politeness where very young women were concerned.

"What do you do here?" he asked.

Jenny turned her sparkling, friendly eyes from Renshaw to this new interrogator.

"Study singing," she answered.

"Have you been here long?"

"Just a year."

"This is your first carnival?"

"Yes."

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"H'm'm." Knott looked at her with his head a trifle on one side. "And I suppose," he proceeded, "being an American, and from Iowa, that you're very religious and all that sort of thing, and work in the American church here, when you're not busy with—with carnivals?"

"Oh, no!" said Jenny, in almost a shocked tone. "Oh, no; I'm not religious at all. Carl says that I'm an out-and-out atheist, and I guess he knows."

"Carl?"

Jenny lowered her eyes and, I think, blushed under her rouge. "He's the Baron von Votta," she replied. "He's the best friend I have in Germany. He's very clever. I've known him ever so long."

"Oh, I see," said Knott. "A year?"

"Oh, no; six months."

Knott's face was bland. "His sisters and his father and his mother and his older brother are very pleasant people, aren't they?" he observed. "I know them well, including your friend Carl."

Jenny's face expressed pleasure at this coincidence, but at the same time an interested ignorance.

"Oh, do you?" she exclaimed. "Isn't that

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nice! I didn't know he had all those relations. I've never met them."

"Haven't you?" said Knott. "I've no doubt he's too busy studying music."

"He doesn't study music," corrected Jenny, "although he plays the piano beautifully. He hasn't time. He's a soldier."

Knott's face lightened with recollection. "Ah, yes," he reflected. "I remember now." He leaned across the table. "That's a very pretty dress you have on," he observed.

I was glad when Renshaw interrupted this catechism by advising Jenny to drink more champagne. "You're not having half a good time," he told her. Catechisms are embarrassing, particularly when they are mystifying as well. I had never seen Knott under circumstances such as the present, and, although I had found him heretofore an innocuous creature enough, I had not been entirely unimpressed by his theoretical hatred of virtue. A protective feeling that I was beginning to experience toward Jenny suffered an increase.

Knott's next move did not add to my enlightenment; he leaned over and absent-mindedly drank Jenny's recently filled glass of champagne. Then

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he stood up. "Twelve o'clock," he announced. "Time to go home."

"Good Lord!" said Renshaw suddenly, and somehow or other managed to disappear in the direction of the next room with a minimum of excuses.

Jenny's mouth drooped in a rebellious curve. "Why," she exclaimed, "it's only just beginning. Everybody unmasks now, and——"

"The rouge," interrupted Knott imperturbably, and as if he hadn't heard her, "on your cheeks is all mottled, and your hair is mussed. You've no idea how odd you look." All of which was untrue.

Jenny blushed under her maligned coloring, and jumped to her feet. "Very well," she said, bridling, "then I'll go. Good night. First I'll say good-by to my friends."

"Bother your friends!" said Knott. He turned to me. "Pay the bill, will you? We'll wait for you outside." And he collected Jenny somewhat as an elderly, unrelenting aunt might have collected a resisting niece and urged her toward the entrance to the arbor.

Rather contrary to my expectations I found the two of them in the street before the restaurant door, Jenny still suffering from outraged feelings,

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for she was silent and cold; Knott, as usual, jauntily garrulous. Our way led from the centre of the town, where clowns and pierrots and shepherds and Tyroleans addressed jocose remarks to us, into quieter streets. Jenny finally paused before a high, narrow house on a corner.

"I live here," she said, "on the fifth floor. I have a studio with another girl. Will you come and see me?" There was not the slightest doubt that the words were addressed to me, but I had no time to reply, for Knott answered with eagerness: "Oh, thanks! Yes, indeed! I'll come—let me see—day after to-morrow for tea. Is that all right? Oh, thanks. Yes, we'll both come."

And it was evident from Jenny's confused attempt to make excuses and her failure to do so, that not only was she unaccustomed to the mendaciousness of polite society, but that she was beginning to suffer, in the presence of Knott, a paralysis similar to my own.

Knott walked silently through the cool, fog-inhabited streets in the direction of my apartment. He said good night, then hesitated and swung back to his original position on the doorstep.

"Know anything about young German officers?" he asked.

"No," I answered.

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"I do. I know them like a book."

For a moment I considered this remark, and then, I am afraid, I laughed and made the obvious retort.

Knott expelled his breath indignantly. "Love!" he exclaimed. "I in love! It isn't very likely, is it, when I can't even bear a woman at meals, except very occasionally? They give me indigestion." And he turned on his heel and strode off. I noticed from the gesticulations of his right hand that he was unaware of the fact that he was without his umbrella.

I went up the dark stairs to the apartment. Renshaw, in a dressing-gown, was smoking a final pipe before the fire.

"What do you make of it?" I asked him.

"Of what?" he replied, without interest.

"The little girl we met to-night."

Renshaw stood up, yawned, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and regarded me with a condescending smile. "I make nothing," he said. "She is not a bacchante, nor, on the other hand, is she a wilful genius. I don't believe she's a bit good at singing. She's a French cake—rum dressing and a sponge-cake heart. She'll cause a lot of trouble, and a dozen times balance on the edge of precipices she hasn't the nerve to jump. Then

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she'll go home and marry the boy she used to flirt with, and who now owns the bank. They all do. The type annoys me."

But I was not so easily satisfied. Few people are when a woman has long and lovely dark eyes, in which, by means of sudden high lights and a trick of arched eyebrows, there seems to lie often a question, pathetic and appealing. I dare say that usually there is no question, and that when there is it isn't worth answering, but what can you do about it?

Knott's answer was perhaps the simplest. Astonishing as it may seem to those who never knew him, we did call upon Jenny the afternoon of the second day after we had met her; we called precisely at four. We climbed the five long flights of stairs that smelled faintly of cabbage, we came to a narrow door from which a great deal of the brown paint had been kicked and rubbed, and Jenny herself let us in, a surprise to me in her black skirt and white shirt-waist, and her slim and of the ordinary-world appearance. I don't know whether I had expected to find her still in a short violet-and-white skirt or not. However, once the shock of this change of costume was recovered from, Jenny proved—and for the moment that was the important point—as pretty,

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even prettier, than when we had first seen her. The background of the large, bare, rather disorderly, rather dusty room, with its somewhat touching attempts to hide the bareness by means of hangings and pictures not too artistic, was a severe one, but she survived the test triumphantly, even although at first she was embarrassed and so rendered awkward. But Knott had a way of setting people speedily at their ease, or, at any rate, of so overwhelming them that they forgot all else, and it wasn't more than a few minutes before he and Jenny were talking to each other as if they were the oldest and most intimate of friends. I was not displeased that they left me alone; I could listen all the better.

Jenny was so lovely, so very charming to watch, so very disappointing whenever she opened her drooping, rather tragic mouth. I had anticipated some such phenomenon as this, but one is none the less disconcerted to find expectations of the kind realized. It was curious to hear issuing from that mouth, so formed for beauty, the strange jumble of opinions, the odds and ends of thought and expression that Jenny had collected in her twenty-four-year journey through the world; the half-baked recklessness, rent by astonishing gaps in knowledge of the world, the

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sentimentalisms and cynicisms which seemed to constitute her point of view. Jenny apparently had no knowledge of the danger of "giving oneself away," yet her frankness, I gathered, was not altogether ingenuousness; it crackled at times with the brittle sureness of untrained youth.

It was easy enough to piece together her history. Back of her was a small town where her father had been a well-to-do contractor, and where she had sung in a choir and astonished her high-school friends and her relatives; and then, before this last adventure to Europe, there had been three years of study in New York. I judged there had been few foolish cults or destructive doctrines over which Jenny had not at some time in her career waxed enthusiastic. A fine-tempered Puritan is needed to stand too sudden a plunge into the world.

Dusk approached, and Jenny gave us careless tea and ragged slices of bread and butter. At her request I lit a lamp, and the circle of light drew the three of us, or, rather Jenny and Knott, into a still more intimate friendliness. I had just decided that Jenny was beginning to like Knott, and I had just about decided that it was time to go, and I imagine Knott was on the point of agreeing with me, when the young Baron von

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Votta entered, and after that, of course, we both decided to stay.

He stood—the young Baron von Votta—for a moment in the doorway, a shining, slim, rigid figure in his tight-fitting, dark-blue uniform; then he came forward, bowed over Jenny's hand, clicked his heels at me, and greeted Knott with polite indifference. I don't think I entirely imagined a slight look of annoyance on the otherwise expressionless face.

Knott was instantly friendly; oddly so, I thought; friendly with a cordiality so little reciprocated that I felt an embarrassment for him in which apparently he did not share.

"How delightful!" he said, in his fluting voice. "How very delightful! How is your dear mother?—your father? I have promised myself the pleasure of calling upon them soon. Your poor mother's rheumatism!"

The young Baron von Votta bowed; his parents were enjoying the best of health. He sat down on the edge of a chair very stiffly, accepted a cup of lukewarm tea from Jenny, and looked at us with the air of a man who is waiting for some one else to make the next move. The burden of the conversation fell as usual upon Knott, and he worthily upheld his traditions in

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this respect, although I still thought that he asked at rather too great a length concerning the happiness of the Von Votta family, and described each member of it to Jenny in too detailed and complimentary a way. Von Votta was not, as far as one could see, greatly interested in his relatives.

Knott and I delayed our going as long as we decently could. Our departure was precipitated by Jenny suggesting that Knott play the piano. "You do play, beautifully, don't you?" she asked.

Knott jumped to his feet. "That's the one request," he said, "that always makes me leave a room."

I waited until we had reached the foot of the stairs and then I said: "He's too good-looking."

"Who?" asked Knott.

"Von Votta. He's too perfect; his hair is too blond, and his eyes are too blue, and he's too pink and white. I dislike him. He has no brains, and I suspect him of not having the slightest symptom of a heart."

Knott swung his umbrella contemptuously.

"You know a great deal about a young man you've only seen for half an hour, don't you?" he remarked.

We walked on for a block in silence.

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"Are they engaged?" I asked.

"Do you think a German officer gets himself engaged to a girl without money?" Knott demanded.

"Well, then?"

Knott became almost angry; at all events he became sententious. "The trouble with you Americans," he grumbled, "is that you're all so damned intellectually virtuous that you can't understand any brand of virtue but your own."

At the entrance to his hotel, where we parted, he made the first of the cryptic remarks which were to distinguish our intercourse for the next two months. "I wonder," he said, slowly and absent-mindedly, "if Von Votta really does play the piano so very well?"

Possibly it was fortunate that the next three weeks I was busy with a minor thesis which I had to prepare for a hirsute and inhuman professor who was attempting to instruct me and my fellow students in the "culture history" of the human race. I say fortunate, because, it being the approach of spring, and the trees beginning to show little green tips along their branches and the days being filled with vagrant and warm breaths of wind, it is possible that I might have begun to

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take far too vital an interest in Jenny Buel, and to acquire far too distinct a dislike for her friend, the young Baron von Votta. As it was, I had no time to think of them at all, and when at last I did emerge from the twisted byways of the minds and costumes of the past, I found that Knott had so secured his hold upon Jenny that no one, no matter how young and devious, could have found more than ten minutes at a time to speak to her alone. Whether she had been worn down by his pertinacity, or whether she had become genuinely fond of him—and I think the latter was the case—she lay, at all events, in his hands as tamely as Browning's famous ripe pear—for social purposes, that is, she had become entirely tractable.

“It's very jolly,” said Knott. “We'll have three now on our little parties—or, rather, four, for Miss Stelwagon will go, too. You've no idea what a good sort Jenny”—and you will notice the use of the Christian name—“is. Like a boy. No nonsense. She doesn't need a chaperon.” He disregarded my taunting laugh, and proceeded to expatiate, to my indignation, upon the satisfaction of meeting at last, in the person of Jenny, a typical American woman instead of the Europeanized imitation usually found.

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Miss Stelwagon proved, overlooking the indisputable fact that she was a maiden, a most efficient chaperon for the many excursions and suppers in which, from now on, she and Jenny joined. She was a gaunt woman who hardly ever spoke, although one was aware that she disagreed with practically everything that was being said. Jenny seemed very fond of her. I imagine that Jenny was going through a period in which she was being very fond of every one. She was expanding.

Meanwhile I wondered, with a deepening curiosity, what Von Votta thought of all this. Knott seemed to be entirely vague. "I've asked him again and again to accompany us," he explained, "but he never will. These young German officers have to be very careful what they do. I dare say we're much too bohemian for him."

"You're getting over your gastronomic aversion for the female sex fairly successfully, aren't you?" I suggested. Knott did not deign to answer me.

But the two or three times I did catch a glimpse of Von Votta I received the impression that underneath the icy calm with which he took his way through the world several things were going on, one of which was an increasing aversion for

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Knott that amounted almost to a hatred. I don't wonder this was so, if for no other reason than that Knott had by now adopted toward him a manner permissible only in an uncle predisposed to gifts. Knott was very much at home in the studio.

On the last afternoon of the occasions I have mentioned, Von Votta's boredom reached a point where he sought refuge in the piano, playing over various pieces in a fugitive way, humming to himself, finally, just before Jenny lit the lamp, bursting into the music of "The Flying Dutchman." It was a singularly dramatic thing to do, because the approaching night was warm and through the open windows came the distant tremblings of thunder. The curtains stirred in the languid breeze. Outlined against the increasing shadow was the rigid, inexplicable figure at the piano. I think, although perhaps it is only looking back on it from the present point of view, that some hint of uneasy terror of this kind of young man stirred me at the moment; some prevision that dehumanization coupled with passion and a sense of beauty is a dangerous thing. And then I looked up. There was still enough light for me to see Von Votta's face clearly, and he was staring at Jenny over the edge of the piano as if he

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wished to bring her within an inch of him with his eyes. . . .

The music ended with a crash of chords. Knott yawned. "Wagner's very bad on the piano, isn't he?" he said. "Well, we must be going. Coming, Von Votta?"

"No!" Von Votta got to his feet and snapped together the pages of an open book of music. It was the first break I had seen in his stubborn armor.

"Very well, then," agreed Knott, securing his umbrella. "Give my respects to your family."

"Knott," I said, when we were out in the hall, "tell me—I want to know something. Drop all nonsense and tell me. What's Von Votta up to? You know."

"Why, my friend," he returned, in his most fluting voice, "it's fairly simple. You surprise me. Here's a German trained in patience, and here's a woman trained, as are all women, to think there's something holy in sacrificing herself for the man she loves, or thinks she loves. If she weren't an American she'd have made the oblation long ago."

He swung his umbrella indifferently. "Von Votta's poor, and he's told Jenny that much as he

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wants to marry her he can't. Of course the point is he wouldn't marry her if he could."

"But you don't think she's really in love with him, do you?" I insisted.

Knott's voice was weary. "How can any one tell that?" he asked. "I think Jenny finds him a hero, and I think that most of all she pities him; and the last is all a woman ever wants to know about a man. And now, for God's sake, let's leave other people's business alone. As far as I am concerned, such matters do not interest me at all; although, in Jenny's case, it might be a pity. She hasn't the making of a first-class Circe."

I did not answer him; I had anticipated, as I said, some such attitude on his part, but this entire cold-bloodedness disgusted me. I was only a trifle less angry with him than with Von Votta. I turned over in my mind various desperate expedients, and then rejected them. The uselessness of insulting or endeavoring to coerce a German officer was apparent. Besides, any attempt of the kind would merely serve to exalt Von Votta in Jenny's distorted vision.

Knott seemed oblivious to the tumult that was going on in my mind. "The Germans are an odd lot," he observed serenely. "Oh, I say, give

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me some more names of those American songs of yours, will you?"

"What American songs?" I asked bitterly.

"The ones I spoke to you about."

"You never mentioned an American song to me in your life," I retorted, with increasing acrimony.

"Didn't I?" Knott paused and looked at me with perplexity. "It must have been Jenny, then. I've got some of them—that 'My Old Kentucky Place,' for instance. Ripping!"

"Damn 'My Old Kentucky Place'!" I said, and left him.

There seemed no more to be done, and, disliking intrigue in which one is merely a static factor, I kept away from Jenny's studio and even avoided Knott, difficult as the latter feat was. Frieda, the stalwart maid of all work at the apartment, was instructed to inform him that I was busy at the university. As his habit had been to come in the afternoon I imagined myself comparatively safe. I was mistaken, as one usually was when one assumed anything definite about Knott. He forced his way past Frieda on a Friday night between eight and nine o'clock. "Good," he said. "I'm glad to find you in at last. We're going to Jenny's studio."

"We're not," I announced firmly.

"Bally Old" Knott

"Oh, yes, we are. She expects us."

I put on my coat.

**"You'll find it very amusing," he continued;
"there'll be music. I'm going to play."**

"You?"

"Yes. I've promised that I would for a long time."

I don't think I realized until we got to Jenny's door that Knott had been lying, that Jenny didn't expect us at all, that here, indeed, was an incident that promised to be "amusing"; for Knott, at first, didn't knock at the door at all; instead, he did something so outrageous, so entirely out of keeping with his character, that anger struggled with my amazement. What he did was to pause in the dim light of the hallway, lay his fingers to his lips, and then tiptoe to the door and place his ear to the crack. Involuntarily I laid hold of his arm. He looked up and again laid his fingers to his lips, and then, after a further period of listening, abruptly resumed his upright position and knocked twice. There was a pause before Jenny herself appeared. In her face I could see astonishment struggling with a desire not to seem unfriendly. The glow of the lamp on the centre-table behind her surrounded her figure with ra-

"Bally Old" Knott

diance, and at the centre-table, erect and unwelcoming, sat Von Votta.

Knott blithely edged his way in. "Excellent!" he announced triumphantly. "Splendid! Here are two musicians! I have come," he explained to Jenny, "to play those American things I've talked so much about. And here's Von Votta. Nothing could be better." He turned to that rigid young man. "It's really great luck," he said.

Von Votta rose and bowed without a word, then he resumed his place by the centre-table. If the expression on Jenny's face could have been accurately described I would have said that it was that of a suppressed sigh. As for Knott, he dominated the scene immediately; he deposited his umbrella in one corner, removed his overcoat with his usual care, extracted a roll of music from his pocket, and, turning about, rubbed his hands together with evident pleasure. "Charming!" he said. "Delightful! As cosy as could be! Shall I begin now, or wait until a little later?"

Von Votta half arose from his chair. "Donnerwetter!" he began, then controlled himself by an immense effort and sat down again. "Begin now," he said wearily.

"Bally Old" Knott

Knott crossed the room in the direction of the piano, but, as he passed the centre-table, suddenly paused and looked down at Von Votta. "Oh, by the way!" he said slowly, and as if he was trying to remember the details of some discussion, "Yes. What was it I wanted to ask you? Ah, I remember! Will you— That little business scheme I mentioned to you, you know."

Von Votta drew back stiffly. "Business scheme!" he ejaculated. Then his face clouded. "No," he said. "No. No, of course I will not sell. I will not even talk about it."

Knott looked over at Jenny and myself. "Isn't that like a German?" he asked, half-humorously, half-despairingly. "All pride. Here's Von Votta has a little place up near Nuremburg—just a tower and a dozen barren fields, and he won't sell. I've been after him a month. Silly, I call it, for he never goes there and I want it badly. I want to live there. I want to write music there." He spread out his hands. "I've offered him five times what the place is worth." He thrust his hands back into his pockets and looked at Von Votta with an intimate slyness. "He's a very foolish young man," he said, "for he may want to get married some time, and yet he refuses

"Bally Old" Knott

a windfall. You persuade him," he concluded, nodding his head at Jenny.

Again a joint in Von Votta's armor cracked.

"Herr Gott!" he ejaculated, and started to his feet. "I will not have my private affairs discussed. I have never met—" He controlled himself. "Ah, well," he said, sinking back into his chair, "it is enough."

"I don't know why you get so angry about it," complained Knott mildly, and continued his journey to the piano.

He lit the lamp that stood upon a stack of music, sat down at the keyboard, and began to play softly. As he played, his notes gained in power.

It is almost an impossible feat to re-create adequately the emotion that art produces. It is a difficult feat, almost a dangerous one, even to insist, once the cause is silent, upon the strength and power of such emotion. We hear a master play the violin, and while he is playing we are as submissive to his notes as the children of Hamelin were to the pipe that drew them; but, once the music stops, we half forget and, what is more, half resent being told how great the magic was. And this is all the truer when the materials of which it was made are common things, such as our

"Bally Old" Knott

minds have been taught to reject, even if our hearts unquestionably accept them. I could write pages and not be able to prove to you that "Money Musk," and "My Old Kentucky Home," and "Old Black Joe," and the whole despised list of them, are beautiful; at all events, I found them beautiful that night. Under Knott's touch they sang and hummed and laughed through the big, dimly lighted room; and I grew very homesick. Even Von Votta was affected; he still sat rigidly upright in his chair, but his face was interested and alert.

Knott played for perhaps an hour—perhaps an hour and a half; then he leaned back against the wall behind him. "Odd things," he said in a disinterested voice. "Rather amusing."

Von Votta got to his feet. "It is late," he announced. He bowed over Jenny's hand and kissed it, swept Knott with his frigid eyes, clicked his heels, and was gone.

"It is only half past ten," said Knott, looking at Jenny, "but you are tired." He proceeded to collect his umbrella and the rest of the paraphernalia that went with his ritual of departure. While his back was turned I had an uninterrupted view of Jenny's face. She was sitting on the edge

"Bally Old" Knott

of the divan, staring into the shadows across the room.

Knott paused at the door of his hotel before ringing for the porter.

"Silly young ass," he said suddenly, "did he think he was going to break up all my little parties?"

EACH IN HIS GENERATION

EVERY afternoon at four o'clock, except when the weather was very bad—autumn, winter, and spring—old Mr. Henry McCain drove up to the small, discreet, polished front door, in the small, discreet, fashionable street in which lived fairly old Mrs. Thomas Denby; got out, went up the white marble steps, rang the bell, and was admitted into the narrow but charming hall—dim turquoise-blue velvet panelled into the walls, an etching or two: Whistler, Brangwyn—by a trim parlor-maid. Ten generations, at least, of trim parlor-maids had opened the door for Mr. McCain. They had seen the sparkling victoria change, not too quickly, to a plum-colored limousine; they had seen Mr. McCain become perhaps a trifle thinner, the color in his cheeks become a trifle more confined and fixed, his white hair grow somewhat sparser, but beyond that they had seen very little indeed, although, when they had left Mr. McCain in the drawing-room with the announcement that Mrs. Denby would be down immediately, and were once again seeking the

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back of the house, no doubt their eyebrows, blonde, brunette, or red, apexed to a questioning angle.

In the manner of youth the parlor-maids had come, worked, fallen in love and departed, but Mr. McCain, in the manner of increasing age, had if anything grown more faithful and exact to the moment. If he were late the fraction of five minutes, one suspected that he regretted it, that it came near to spoiling his entire afternoon. He was not articulate, but occasionally he expressed an idea and the most common was that he "liked his things as he liked them"; his eggs, in other words, boiled just so long, no more—after sixty years of inner debate on the subject he had apparently arrived at the conclusion that boiled eggs were the only kind of eggs permissible—his life punctual and serene. The smallest manifestation of unexpectedness disturbed him. Obviously that was one reason why, after a youth not altogether constant, he had become so utterly constant where Mrs. Denby was concerned. She had a quality of perennality, charming and assuring, even to each strand of her delicate brown hair. Grayness should have been creeping upon her, but it was not. It was doubtful if Mr. McCain permitted himself, even secretly, to wonder

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why. Effects, fastidious and constant, were all that he demanded from life.

This had been going on for twenty years—this afternoon call; this slow drive afterward in the park; this return by dusk to the shining small house in the shining small street; the good-by, reticently ardent, as if it were not fully Mr. McCain's intention to return again in the evening. Mr. McCain would kiss Mrs. Denby's hand—slim, lovely, with a single gorgeous sapphire upon the third finger. "Good-by, my dear," he would say, "you have given me the most delightful afternoon of my life." For a moment Mrs. Denby's hand would linger on the bowed head; then Mr. McCain would straighten up, smile, square his shoulders in their smart, young-looking coat, and depart to his club or the large, softly-lit house where he dwelt alone. At dinner he would drink two glasses of champagne. Before he drained the last sip of the second pouring he would hold the glass up to the fire, so that the bronze coruscations at the heart of the wine glowed like fireflies in a gold dusk. One imagined him saying to himself: "A perfect woman! A perfect woman—God bless her!" Saying "God bless" any one, mind you, with a distinct warming of the heart, but a thoroughly late-Victorian

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disbelief in any god to bless. . . . At least, you thought as much.

And, of course, one had not the slightest notion whether he—old Mr. Henry McCain—was aware that this twenty years of devotion on his part to Mrs. Denby was the point upon which had come to focus the not inconsiderable contempt and hatred for him of his nephew Adrian.

It was an obvious convergence, this devotion, of all the traits which composed, so Adrian imagined, the despicable soul that lay beneath his uncle's unangled exterior: undeviating self-indulgence; secrecy; utter selfishness—he was selfish even to the woman he was supposed to love; that is, if he was capable of loving any one but himself—a bland hypocrisy; an unthinking conformation to the dictates of an unthinking world. The list could be multiplied. But to sum it up, here was epitomized, beautifully, concretely, the main and minor vices of a generation for which Adrian found little pity in his heart; a generation brittle as ice; a generation of secret diplomacy; a generation that in its youth had covered a lack of bathing by a vast amount of perfume. That was it—! That expressed it perfectly! The just summation! Camellias, and double intentions in speech, and unnecessary

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reticences, and refusals to meet the truth, and a deliberate hiding of ugliness!

Most of the time Adrian was too busy to think about his uncle at all—he was a very busy man with his writing: journalistic writing; essays, political reviews, propaganda—and because he was busy he was usually well-content, and not uncharitable, except professionally; but once a month it was his duty to dine with his uncle, and then, for the rest of the night, he was disturbed, and awoke the next morning with the dusty feeling in his head of a man who has been slightly drunk. Old wounds were recalled, old scars inflamed; a childhood in which his uncle's figure had represented to him the terrors of sarcasm and repression; a youth in which, as his guardian, his uncle had deprecated all first fine hot-bloodedness and enthusiasms; a young manhood in which he had been told cynically that the ways of society were good ways, and that the object of life was material advancement; advice which had been followed by the stimulus of an utter refusal to assist financially except where absolutely necessary. There had been willingness, you understand, to provide a gentleman's education, but no willingness to provide beyond that any of a gentleman's perquisites. That much of his early

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success had been due to this heroic upbringing, Adrian was too honest not to admit, but then—by God, it had been hard! All the color of youth! No time to dream—except sorely! Some warping, some perversion! A gasping, heart-breaking knowledge that you could not possibly keep up with the people with whom, paradoxically enough, you were supposed to spend your leisure hours. Here was the making of a radical. And yet, despite all this, Adrian dined with his uncle once a month.

The mere fact that this was so, that it could be so, enraged him. It seemed a renunciation of all he affirmed; an implicit falsehood. He would have liked very much to have got to his feet, standing firmly on his two long, well-made legs, and have once and for all delivered himself of a final philippic. The philippic would have ended something like this:

“And this, sir, is the last time I sacrifice any of my good hours to you. Not because you are old, and therefore think you are wise, when you are not; not because you are blind and besotted and damned—a trunk of a tree filled with dry rot that presently a clean wind will blow away; not because your opinions, and the opinions of all like you, have long ago been proven the lies and

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idiocies that they are; not even because you haven't one single real right left to live—I haven't come to tell you these things, although they are true, for you are past hope and there is no use wasting words upon you; I have come to tell you that you bore me inexpressibly. (That would be the most dreadful revenge of all. He could see his uncle's face!) That you have a genius for taking the wrong side of every question, and I can no longer endure it. I dissipate my time. Good-night!"

He wouldn't have said it in quite so stately a way, possibly; the sentences would not have been quite so rounded, but the context would have been the same.

Glorious; but it wasn't said. Instead, once a month, he got into his dinner-jacket, brushed his hair very sleekly, walked six blocks, said good-evening to his uncle's butler, and went on back to the library, where, in a room rich with costly bindings, and smelling pleasantly of leather, and warmly yellow with the light of two shaded lamps, he would find his uncle reading before a crackling wood fire. What followed was almost a formula, an exquisite presentation of stately manners, an exquisite avoidance of any topic which might cause a real discussion. The dinner

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was invariably gentle, persuasive, a thoughtful gastronomic achievement. Heaven might become confused about its weather, and about wars, and things like that, but Mr. McCain never became confused about his menus. He had a habit of commending wine. "Try this claret, my dear fellow, I want your opinion. . . . A drop of this Napoleonic brandy won't hurt you a bit." He even sniffed the bouquet before each sip; passed, that is, the glass under his nose and then drank. But Adrian, with a preconceived image of the personality back of this, and the memory of too many offences busy in his mind, saw nothing quaint or amusing. His gorge rose. Damn his uncle's wines, and his mushrooms, and his soft-footed servants, and his house of nuances and evasions, and his white grapes, large and outwardly perfect, and inwardly sentimental as the generation whose especial fruit they were. As for himself, he had a recollection of ten years of poverty after leaving college; a recollection of sweat and indignities; he had also a recollection of some poor people whom he had known.

Afterward, when the dinner was over, Adrian would go home and awake his wife, Cecil, who, with the brutal honesty of an honest woman, also some of the ungenerosity, had early in her mar-

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ried life flatly refused any share in the ceremonies described. Cecil would lie in her small white bed, the white of her boudoir-cap losing itself in the white of the pillow, a little sleepy and a little angrily perplexed at the perpetual jesuitical philosophy of the male. "If you feel that way," she would ask, "why do you go there, then? Why don't you banish your uncle utterly?" She asked this not without malice, her long, violet, Slavic eyes widely open, and her red mouth, a trifle too large, perhaps, a trifle cruel, fascinatingly interrogative over her white teeth. She loved Adrian and had at times, therefore, the right and desire to torture him. She knew perfectly well why he went. He was his uncle's heir, and until such time as money and other anachronisms of the present social system were done away with, there was no use throwing a fortune into the gutter, even if by your own efforts you were making an income just sufficiently large to keep up with the increased cost of living.

Sooner or later Adrian's mind reverted to Mrs. Denby. This was usually after he had been in bed and had been thinking for a while in the darkness. He could not understand Mrs. Denby. She affronted his modern habit of thought.

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"The whole thing is so silly and adventitious!"

"What thing?"

Adrian was aware that his wife knew exactly of what he was talking, but he had come to expect the question. "Mrs. Denby and my uncle." He would grow rather gently cross. "It has always reminded me of those present-day sword-and-cloak romances fat business men used to write about ten years ago and sell so enormously—there's an atmosphere of unnecessary intrigue. What's it all about? Here's the point! Why, if she felt this way about things, didn't she divorce that gentle drunkard of a husband of hers years ago and marry my uncle outright and honestly? Or why, if she couldn't get a divorce—which she could—didn't she leave her husband and go with my uncle? Anything in the open! Make a break—have some courage of her opinions! Smash things; build them up again! Thank God nowadays, at least, we have come to believe in the cleanness of surgery rather than the concealing palliatives of medicine. We're no longer—we modern people—afraid of the world; and the world can never hurt for any length of time any one who will stand up to it and tell it courageously to go to hell. No! It comes back and licks hands.

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"I'll tell you why. My uncle and Mrs. Denby are the typical moral cowards of their generation. There's selfishness, too. What a travesty of love! Of course there's scandal, a perpetual scandal; but it's a hidden, sniggering scandal they don't have to meet face to face; and that's all they ask of life, they, and people like them—never to have to meet anything face to face. So long as they can bury their heads like ostriches! . . . Faugh!" There would be a moment's silence; then Adrian would complete his thought. "In my uncle's case," he would grumble in the darkness, "one phase of the selfishness is obvious. He couldn't even get himself originally, I suppose, to face the inevitable matter-of-fact moments of marriage. It began when he was middle-aged, a bachelor—I suppose he wants the sort of Don Juan, eighteen-eighty, perpetual sort of romance that doesn't exist outside the brains of himself and his like. . . . Camellias!"

Usually he tried to stir up argument with his wife, who in these matters agreed with him utterly; even more than agreed with him, since she was the escaped daughter of rich and stodgy people, and had insisted upon earning her own living by portrait-painting. Theoretically, therefore, she was, of course, an anarchist. But at

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moments like the present her silent assent and the aura of slight weariness over an ancient subject which emanated from her in the dusk, affronted Adrian as much as positive opposition.

"Why don't you try to understand me?"

"I do, dearest!"—a pathetic attempt at eager agreement.

"Well, then, if you do, why is the tone of your voice like that? You know by now what I think. I'm not talking convention; I believe there are no laws higher than the love of a man for a woman. It should seek expression as a seed seeks sunlight. I'm talking about honesty; bravery; a willingness to accept the consequences of one's acts and come through; about the intention to sacrifice for love just what has to be sacrificed. What's the use of it otherwise? That's one real advance the modern mind has made, anyhow, despite all the rest of the welter and uncertainty."

"Of course, dearest."

He would go on. After a while Cecil would awake guiltily and inject a fresh, almost gay interest into her sleepy voice. She was not so unfettered as not to dread the wounded esteem of the unlistened-to male. She would lean over and kiss Adrian.

"Do go to sleep, darling! What's the sense?

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Pretty soon your uncle will be dead—wretched old man! Then you'll never have to think of him again." Being a childless woman, her red, a trifle cruel mouth, would twist itself in the darkness into a small, secretive, maternal smile.

But old Mr. Henry McCain didn't die; instead he seemed to be caught up in the condition of static good health which frequently companions entire selfishness and a careful interest in oneself. His butler died, which was very annoying. Mr. McCain seemed to consider it the breaking of a promise made fifteen or so years before. It was endlessly a trouble instructing a new man, and then, of course, there was Adlington's family to be looked after, and taxes had gone up, and Mrs. Adlington was a stout woman who, despite the fact that Adlington, while alive, had frequently interrupted Mr. McCain's breakfast newspaper reading by asserting that she was a person of no character, now insisted upon weeping noisily every time Mr. McCain granted her an interview. Also, and this was equally unexpected, since one rather thought he would go on living forever, like one of the damper sort of fungi, Mr. Denby came home from the club one rainy spring night with a slight cold and died, three days later, with extraordinary gentleness.

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"My uncle," said Adrian, "is one by one losing his accessories. After a while it will be his teeth."

Cecil was perplexed. "I don't know exactly what to do," she complained. "I don't know whether to treat Mrs. Denby as a bereaved aunt, a non-existent family skeleton, or a released menace. I dare say now, pretty soon, she and your uncle will be married. Meanwhile I suppose it is rather silly of me not to call and see if I can help her in any way. After all, we do know her intimately, whether we want to or not, don't we? We meet her about all the time, even if she wasn't motoring over to your uncle's place in the summer when we stop there."

So she went, being fundamentally kindly and fundamentally curious. She spoke of the expedition as "a descent upon Fair Rosamund's bower."

The small, yellow-panelled drawing-room, where she awaited Mrs. Denby's coming, was lit by a single silver vase-lamp under an orange shade and by a fire of thin logs, for the April evening was damp with a hesitant rain. On the table, near the lamp, was a silver vase with three yellow tulips in it, and Cecil, wandering about, came upon a double photograph frame, back of the vase, that made her gasp. She picked it up

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and stared at it. Between the alligator edging, facing each other obliquely, but with the greatest amity, were Mr. Thomas Denby in the fashion of ten years before, very handsome, very well-groomed, with the startled expression which any definite withdrawal from his potational pursuits was likely to produce upon his countenance, and her uncle-in-law, Mr. Henry McCain, also in the fashion of ten years back. She was holding the photographs up to the light, her lips still apart, when she heard a sound behind her, and, putting the frame back guiltily, turned about. Mrs. Denby was advancing toward her. She seemed entirely unaware of Cecil's malfeasance; she was smiling faintly; her hand was cordial, grateful.

"You are very good," she murmured. "Sit here by the fire. We will have some tea directly."

Cecil could not but admit that she was very lovely; particularly lovely in the black of her mourning, with her slim neck, rising up from its string of pearls, to a head small and like a delicate white-and-gold flower. An extraordinarily well-bred woman, a sort of misty Du Maurier woman, of a type that had become almost non-existent, if ever it had existed in its perfection at all. And, curiously enough, a woman whose beauty seemed to have been sharpened by many

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fine-drawn renunciations. Now she looked at her hands as if expecting Cecil to say something.

"I think such calls as this are always very useless, but then—"

"Exactly—but then! They mean more than anything else in the world, don't they? When one reaches fifty-five one is not always used to kindness. . . . You are very kind. . . ." She raised her eyes.

Cecil experienced a sudden impulsive warmth. "After all, what did she or any one else know about other people's lives? Poor souls! What a base thing life often was!"

"I want you to understand that we are always so glad, both Adrian and myself. . . . Any time we can help in any way, you know—"

"Yes, I think you would. You—I have watched you both. You don't mind, do you? I think you're both rather great people—at least, my idea of greatness."

Cecil's eyes shone just a little; then she sat back and drew together her eager, rather childish mouth. This wouldn't do! She had not come here to encourage sentimentalization. With a determined effort she lifted her mind outside the circle of commiseration which threatened to surround it. She deliberately reset the conversation

CHAPTER II THE PENTAGONAL

THE HOUSE WAS A LARGE ONE, THE ALLEGEDLY BEING
BUILT FOR THE PURPOSE OF BEING THE FIRST
AND THE LAST OF THE HOUSES BUILT IN THE DISTRICT
BY THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. THE HOUSE WAS
BUILT IN THE YEAR 1851, AND WAS THE FIRST
BUILT IN THE DISTRICT SINCE THE HOUSE OF
COMMONS WAS BUILT IN THE YEAR 1851. THE
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THE DISTRICT SINCE THE HOUSE OF
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"A VERY GOOD" SHE REPLIED. "SO
WELL AS THE V.C. WILL HAVE BEEN AS DIRECTLY."

"AND SHE WAS NOT AS DIRECTLY THAT SHE WAS VERY
WELL AS THE V.C. WILL HAVE BEEN AS DIRECTLY."
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hands as if expecting Cecil's sympathy.
"I think such calls as this are doubtless
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"Exactly—but then! They mean more
anything else in the world. I don't know. When
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raised her eyes.

Cecil experienced a sudden change of heart.
"After all, what did he mean? . . .
about other people's feet? . . . I don't know. . . .
a base thing like other—"

"I want you to understand. . . .
so glad, both. . . . I don't know. . . .
infinitely
we can help in any way possible."

"Yes, I think you will. . . . instantly.
you both. . . . I don't know. . . .
you're both. . . . Good-by!"
idea of goodness. . . . the latest trim

Cecil's eye was fixed on the keen,
back and down. . . . He rode briskly down
mouth. . . . bronze eyebrow
they met. "O
more very pretty
taste! Not for
outwardly;

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to impersonal limits. She was sure that Mrs. Denby was aware of her intention, adroitly concealed as it was. This made her uncomfortable, ashamed. And yet she was irritated with herself. Why should she particularly care what this woman thought in ways as subtle as this? Obvious kindness was her intention, not mental charity pursued into tortuous by-paths. And, besides, her frank, boyish cynicism, its wariness, revolted, even while she felt herself flattered at the prospect of the confidences that seemed to tremble on Mrs. Denby's lips. It wouldn't do to "let herself in for anything"; to "give herself away." No! She adopted a manner of cool, entirely reflective kindness. But she was not sure that she was thoroughly successful. There was a lingering impression that Mrs. Denby was penetrating the surface to the unwilling interest beneath. Cecil suspected that this woman was trained in discriminations and half-lights to which she and her generation had joyfully made themselves blind. She felt uncomfortably young; a little bit smiled at in the most kindly of hidden ways. Just as she was leaving, the subversive softness came close to her again, like a wave of too much perfume as you open a

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church-door; as if some one were trying to embrace her against her will.

"You will understand," said Mrs. Denby, "that you have done the very nicest thing in the world. I am horribly lonely. I have few women friends. Perhaps it is too much to ask—but if you could call again sometime. Yes . . . I would appreciate it so greatly."

She let go of Cecil's hand and walked to the door, and stood with one long arm raised against the curtain, her face turned toward the hall.

"There is no use," she said, "in attempting to hide my husband's life, for every one knows what it was, but then—yes, I think you will understand. I am a childless woman, you see; he was infinitely pathetic."

Cecil felt that she must run away, instantly. "I do—" she said brusquely. "I understand more than other women. Perfectly! Good-by!"

She found herself brushing past the latest trim parlor-maid, and out once more in the keen, sweet, young dampness. She strode briskly down the deserted street. Her fine bronze eyebrows were drawn down to where they met. "Good Lord! Damn!"—Cecil swore very prettily and modernly—"What rotten taste! Not frankness, whatever it might seem outwardly; not frank-

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ness, but devious excuses! Some more of Adrian's hated past-generation stuff! And yet—no! The woman was sincere—perfectly! She had meant it—that about her husband. And she *was* lovely—and she was fine, too! It was impossible to deny it. But—a childless woman! About that drunken tailor's model of a husband! And then—Uncle Henry! . . .” Cecil threw back her head; her eyes gleamed in the wet radiance of a corner lamp; she laughed without making a sound, and entirely without amusement.

But it is not true that good health is static, no matter how carefully looked after. And, despite the present revolt against the Greek spirit, Time persists in being bigotedly Greek. The tragedy—provided one lives long enough—is always played out to its logical conclusion. For every hour you have spent, no matter how quietly or beautifully or wisely, Nemesis takes toll in the end. You peter out; the engine dulls; the shining coin wears thin. If it's only that it is all right; you are fortunate if you don't become greasy, too, or blurred, or scarred. And Mr. McCain had not spent all his hours wisely or beautifully, or even quietly, underneath the surface. He suddenly developed what he called “acute indigestion.” “Odd!” he complained, “and exceedingly tire-

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some! I've been able to eat like an ostrich all my life." Adrian smiled covertly at the simile, but his uncle was unaware that it was because in Adrian's mind the simile applied to his uncle's conscience, not his stomach.

It *was* an odd disease, that "acute indigestion." It manifested itself by an abrupt tragic stare in Mr. McCain's eyes, a whiteness of cheek, a clutching at the left side of the breast; it resulted also in his beginning to walk very slowly indeed. One day Adrian met Carron, his uncle's physician, as he was leaving a club after luncheon. Carron stopped him. "Look here, Adrian," he said, "is that new man of your uncle's—that valet, or whatever he is—a good man?"

Adrian smiled. "I didn't hire him," he answered, "and I couldn't discharge him if I wanted—in fact, any suggestion of that kind on my part, would lead to his employment for life. Why?"

"Because," said Carron, "he impresses me as being rather young and flighty, and some day your uncle is going to die suddenly. He may last five years; he may snuff out to-morrow. It's his heart." His lips twisted pityingly. "He prefers to call it by some other name," he added, "and he would never send for me again if he knew I

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had told you, but you ought to know. He's a game old cock, isn't he?"

"Oh, very!" agreed Adrian. "Yes, game! Very, indeed!"

He walked slowly down the sunlit courtway on which the back door of the club opened, swinging his stick and meditating. Spring was approaching its zenith. In the warm May afternoon pigeons tumbled about near-by church spires which cut brown inlays into the soft blue sky. There was a feeling of open windows; a sense of unseen tulips and hyacinths; of people playing pianos. . . . Too bad, an old man dying that way, his hand furtively seeking his heart, when all this spring was about! Terror in possession of him, too! People like that hated to die; they couldn't see anything ahead. Well, Adrian reflected, the real tragedy of it hadn't been his fault. He had always been ready at the slightest signal to forget almost everything—yes, almost everything. Even that time when, as a sweating newspaper reporter, he had, one dusk, watched in the park his uncle and Mrs. Denby drive past in the cool seclusion of a shining victoria. Curious! In itself the incident was small, but it had stuck in his memory more than others far more serious, as concrete instances are likely

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to do. . . . No, he wasn't sorry; not a bit! He was glad, despite the hesitation he experienced in saying to himself the final word. He had done his best, and this would mean his own release and Cecil's. It would mean at last the blessed feeling that he could actually afford a holiday, and a little unthinking laughter, and, at thirty-nine, the dreams for which, at twenty-five, he had never had full time. He walked on down the courtway more briskly.

That Saturday night was the night he dined with his uncle. It had turned very warm; unusually warm for the time of year. When he had dressed and had sought out Cecil to say good-by to her he found her by the big studio window on the top floor of the apartment where they lived. She was sitting in the window-seat, her chin cupped in her hand, looking out over the city, in the dark pool of which lights were beginning to open like yellow water-lilies. Her white arm gleamed in the gathering dusk, and she was dressed in some diaphanous blue stuff that enhanced the bronze of her hair. Adrian took his place silently beside her and leaned out. The air was very soft and hot and embracing, and up here it was very quiet, as if one floated above the lower clouds of perpetual sound.

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Cecil spoke at last. "It's lovely, isn't it?" she said. "I should have come to find you, but I couldn't. These first warm nights! You really understand why people persist in living, don't you? It's like a pulse coming back to a hand you love." She was silent a moment. "Kiss me," she said, finally. "I—I'm so glad I love you, and we're young."

He stooped down and put his arms about her. He could feel her tremble. How fragrant she was, and queer, and mysterious, even if he had lived with her now for almost fifteen years! He was infinitely glad at the moment for his entire life. He kissed her again, kissed her eyes, and she went down the stairs with him to the hall-door. She was to stop for him at his uncle's, after a dinner to which she was going.

Adrian lit a cigarette and walked instead of taking the elevator. It was appropriate to his mood that on the second floor some one with a golden Italian voice should be singing "Louise." He paused for a moment. He was reminded of a night long ago in Verona, when there had been an open window and moonlight in the street. Then he looked at his watch. He was late; he would have to hurry. It amused him that at his

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age he should still fear the silent rebuke with which his uncle punished unpunctuality.

He arrived at his destination as a near-by church clock struck the half-hour. The new butler admitted him and led him back to where his uncle was sitting by an open window; the curtains stirred in the languid breeze, the suave room was a little penetrated by the night, as if some sly, disorderly spirit was investigating uninvited. It was far too hot for the wood fire—that part of the formula had been omitted, but otherwise each detail was the same. “The two hundredth time!” Adrian thought to himself. “The two hundredth time, at least! It will go on forever!” And then the formula was altered again, for his uncle got to his feet, laying aside the evening paper with his usual precise care. “My dear fellow,” he began, “so good of you! On the minute, too! I—” and then he stumbled and put out his hand. “My glasses!” he said.

Adrian caught him and held him upright. He swayed a little. “I— Lately I have had to use them sometimes, even when not reading,” he murmured. “Thank you! Thank you!”

Adrian went back to the chair where his uncle had been sitting. He found the glasses—gold

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pince-nez—but they were broken neatly in the middle, lying on the floor, as if they had dropped from some one's hand. He looked at them for a moment, puzzled, before he gave them back to his uncle.

"Here they are, sir," he said. "But—it's very curious. They're broken in such an odd way."

His uncle peered down at them. He hesitated and cleared his throat. "Yes," he began; then he stood up straight, with an unexpected twist of his shoulders. "I was turning them between my fingers," he said, "just before you came in. I had no idea—no, no idea! Shall we go in? I think dinner has been announced."

There was the sherry in the little deeply cut glasses, and the clear soup, with a dash of lemon in it, and the fish, and afterward the roast chicken, with vegetables discreetly limited and designed not to detract from the main dish; and there was a pint of champagne for Adrian and a mild white wine for his uncle. The latter twisted his mouth in a dry smile. "One finds it difficult to get old," he said. "I have always been very fond of champagne. More æsthetically I think than the actual taste. It seems to sum up so well the evening mood—dinner and laughter and forgetting the day. But now—" he flicked contemptuously the

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stem of his glass—"I am only allowed this uninspired stuff." He stopped suddenly and his face twisted into the slight grimace which Adrian in the past few weeks had been permitted occasionally to see. His hand began to wander vaguely over the white expanse of his shirt.

Adrian pushed back his chair. "Let me—I" he began, but his uncle waved a deprecating hand. "Sit down!" he managed to say. "Please!" Adrian sank back again. The color returned to his uncle's cheeks and the staring question left his eyes. He took a sip of wine.

"I cannot tell you," he observed with elaborate indifference, "how humiliating this thing is becoming to me. I have always had a theory that invalids and people when they begin to get old and infirm, should be put away some place where they can undergo the unpleasant struggle alone. It's purely selfish—there's something about the sanctity of the individual. Dogs have it right—you know the way they creep off? But I suppose I won't. Pride fails when the body weakens, doesn't it, no matter what the will may be?" He lifted his wine-glass. "I am afraid I am giving you a very dull evening, my dear fellow," he apologized. "Forgive me! We will talk of more

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pleasant things. I drink wine with you! How is Cecil? Doing well with her painting?"

Adrian attempted to relax his own inner grimness. He responded to his uncle's toast. But he wished this old man, so very near the mysterious crisis of his affairs, would begin to forego to some extent the habit of a lifetime, become a little more human. This ridiculous "façade"! The dinner progressed.

Through an open window the night, full of soft, distant sound, made itself felt once more. The candles, under their red shades, flickered at intervals. The noiseless butler came and went. How old his uncle was getting to look, Adrian reflected. There was a grayness about his cheeks; fine, wire-like lines about his mouth. And he was falling into that sure sign of age, a vacant absent-mindedness. Half the time he was not listening to what he, Adrian, was saying; instead, his eyes sought constantly the shadows over the carved sideboard across the table from him. What did he see there? What question was he asking? Adrian wondered. Only once was his uncle very much interested, and that was when Adrian had spoken of the war and the psychology left in its train. Adrian himself had not long before been released from a weary round of training-camps,

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where, in Texas dust, or the unpleasant resinous summer of the South, he had gone through a repetition that in the end had threatened to render him an imbecile. He was not illusioned. As separate personalities, men had lost much of their glamour for him; there had been too much sweat, too much crowding, too much invasion of dignity, of everything for which the world claimed it had been struggling and praying. But alongside of this revolt on his part had grown up an immense pity and belief in humanity as a mass—struggling, worm-like, aspiring, idiotic, heroic. The thought of it made him uncomfortable and at the same time elate.

His uncle shook a dissenting head. On this subject he permitted himself mild discussion, but his voice was still that of an old, wearied man, annoyed and bewildered. "Oh, no!" he said. "That's the very feature of it that seems to me most dreadful; the vermicular aspect; the massed uprising; the massed death. About professional armies there was something decent—about professional killing. It was cold-blooded and keen, anyway. But this modern war, and this modern craze for self-revelation! Naked! Why, these books—the young men kept their fingers on the pulse of their reactions. It isn't clean; it makes

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the individual cheap. War is a dreadful thing; it should be as hidden as murder." He sat back, smiled. "We seem to have a persistent tendency to become serious to-night," he remarked.

Serious! Adrian saw a vision of the drill-grounds, and smiled sardonically; then he raised his head in surprise, for the new butler had broken all the rules of the household and was summoning his uncle to the telephone in the midst of dessert. He awaited the expected rebuke, but it did not come. Instead, his uncle paused in the middle of a sentence, stared, and looked up. "Ah, yes!" he said, and arose from his chair. "Forgive me, Adrian, I will be back shortly." He walked with a new, just noticeable, infirmness toward the door. Once there he seemed to think an apology necessary, for he turned and spoke with absent-minded courtesy.

"You may not have heard," he said, "but Mrs. Denby is seriously ill. Her nurse gives me constant bulletins over the telephone."

Adrian started to his feet, then sat down again. "But—" he stuttered—"but—is it as bad as all that?"

"I am afraid," said his uncle gently, "it could not be worse." The curtain fell behind him.

Adrian picked up his fork and began to stir

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gently the melting ice on the plate before him, but his eyes were fixed on the wall opposite, where, across the shining table, from a mellow gold frame, a portrait of his grandfather smiled with a benignity, utterly belying his traditional character, into the shadows above the candles. But Adrian was not thinking of his grandfather just then, he was thinking of his uncle—and Mrs. Denby. What in the world—! Dangerously ill, and yet here had been his uncle able to go through with—not entirely calmly, to be sure; Adrian remembered the lack of attention, the broken eye-glasses—and yet, still able to go through with, not obviously shaken, this monthly farce; this dinner that in reality mocked all the real meaning of blood-relationship. Good Lord! To Adrian's modern mind, impatient and courageous, the situation was preposterous, grotesque. He himself would have broken through to the woman he loved, were she seriously ill, if all the city was cordoned to keep him back. What could it mean? Entire selfishness on his uncle's part? Surely not that! That was too inhuman! Adrian was willing to grant his uncle exceptional expertness in the art of self-protection, but there was a limit even to self-protection. There must be some other reason. Discretion? More likely, and yet

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how absurd! Had Mr. Denby been alive, a meticulous, fantastic delicacy might have intervened, but Mr. Denby was dead. Who was there to wound, or who left for the telling of tales? A doctor and the servants. This was not altogether reasonable, despite what he knew of his uncle. Here was some oddity of psychology he could not follow. He heard the curtains stir as his uncle reentered. He looked up, attentive and curious, but his uncle's face was the mask to which he was accustomed.

"How is Mrs. Denby?" he asked.

Mr. McCain hesitated for the fraction of a second. "I am afraid, very ill," he said. "Very ill, indeed! It is pneumonia. I—the doctor thinks it is only a question of a little time, but—well, I shall continue to hope for the best." There was a metallic harshness to his concluding words. "Shall we go into the library?" he continued. "I think the coffee will be pleasanter there."

They talked again of the war; of revolution; of the dark forces at large in the world.

Through that hour or two Adrian had a nakedness of perception unusual even to his sensitive mind. It seemed to him three spirits were abroad in the quiet, softly-lit, book-lined room;

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three intentions that crept up to him like the waves of the sea, receded, crept back again; or were they currents of air? or hesitant, unheard feet that advanced and withdrew? In the open windows poured at times the warm, enveloping scent of the spring; pervading, easily overlooked, lawless, persistent, inevitable. Adrian found himself thinking it was like the presence of a woman. And then, overlapping this, would come the careful, dry, sardonic tones of his uncle's voice, as if insisting that the world was an ordinary world, and that nothing, not even love or death, could lay disrespectful fingers upon or hurry for a moment the trained haughtiness of the will. Yet even this compelling arrogance was at times overtaken, submerged, by a third presence, stronger even than the other two; a presence that entered upon the heels of night; the ceaseless murmur of the streets; the purring of rubber tires upon asphalt; a girl's laugh, high, careless, reckless. Life went on. Never for a moment did it stop.

"I am not sorry that I am getting old," said Mr. McCain. "I think nowadays is an excellent time to die. Perhaps for the very young, the strong—but for me, things are too busy, too hurried. I have always liked my life like potpourri. I like to keep it in a china jar and occasionally

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take off the lid. Otherwise one's sense of perfume becomes satiated. Take your young girls; they remain faithful to a love that is not worth being faithful to—all noise, and flushed laughter, and open doors." Quite unexpectedly he began to talk in a way he had never talked before. He held his cigar in his hand until the ash turned cold; his fingers trembled just a little.

"You have been very good to me," he said. Adrian raised startled eyes. "Very good. I am quite aware that you dislike me"—he hesitated and the ghost of a smile hovered about his lips—"and I have always disliked you. Please!" He raised a silencing hand. "You don't mind my saying so? No. Very well, then, there is something I want to tell you. Afterward I will never mention it again. I dare say our mutual dislike is due to the inevitable misunderstanding that exists between the generations. But it is not important. The point is that we have always been well-bred toward each other. Yes, that is the point. You have always been a gentleman, very considerate, very courteous. I cannot help but admire you. And I think you will find I have done the best I could. I am not a rich man, as such things go nowadays, but I will hand you on the money that will be yours quite unimpaired,

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possibly added to. I feel very strongly on that subject. I am old-fashioned enough to consider the family the most important thing in life. After all, we are the only two McCains left." He hesitated again and twisted for a moment his bloodless hands in his lap, then he raised his eyes and spoke with a curious hurried embarrassment. "I have sacrificed a great deal for that," he said. "Yes, a great deal."

The soft-footed butler stood at his elbow, like an actor in comedy suddenly cast for the rôle of a portentous messenger.

"Miss Niles is calling you again, sir," he said.

"Oh, yes!—ah—Adrian, I am very sorry, my dear fellow. I will finish the conversation when I come back."

This time the telephone was within earshot; in the hall outside. Adrian heard his uncle's slow steps end in the creaking of a chair as he sat down; then the picking up of the receiver. The message was a long one, for his uncle did not speak for fully a minute; finally his voice drifted in through the curtained doorway.

"You think . . . only a few minutes?"

". . . Ah, yes! Conscious? Yes. Well, will you tell her, Miss Niles?—yes, please listen very carefully—tell her this. That I am not there

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because I dared not come. Yes; on her account. She will understand. My heart—it's my heart. She will understand. I did not dare. For her sake, not mine. Tell her that. She will understand. Please be very careful in repeating the message, Miss Niles. Tell her I dared not come because of my heart. . . . Yes; thank you. That's it. . . . What? Yes, I will wait, Miss Niles."

Adrian, sitting in the library, suddenly got to his feet and crossed to the empty fireplace and stood with his back to it, enlightenment and a puzzled frown struggling for possession of his face. His uncle's heart! Ah, he understood, then! It was discretion, after all, but not the kind he thought—a much more forgivable discretion. And, yet, what possible difference could it make should his uncle die suddenly in Mrs. Denby's house? Fall dead across her bed, or die kneeling beside it? Poor, twisted old fool, afraid even at the end that death might catch him out; afraid of a final undignified gesture.

A motor blew its horn for the street crossing. Another girl laughed; a young, thin, excited girl, to judge by her laughter. The curtains stirred and again there was that underlying scent of tulips and hyacinths; and then, from the hall out-

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side, came the muffled thud of a receiver falling to the floor. Adrian waited. The receiver was not picked up. He strode to the door. Crumpled up over the telephone was old Mr. McCain.

Cecil came later. She was very quick and helpful, and jealously solicitous on Adrian's account, but in the taxicab going home she said the one thing Adrian had hoped she wouldn't say, and yet was sure she would. She belonged to a sex which, if it is honest at all, is never reticently so. She believed that between the man she loved and herself there were no possible mental withdrawals. "It is very tragic," she said, "but much better—you know it is better. He belonged to the cumberers of the earth. Yes, so much better; and this way, too!"

In the darkness her hand sought his. Adrian took it, but in his heart was the same choked feeling, the same knowledge that something was gone that could not be found again, that, as a little boy, he had had when they sold, at his father's death, the country place where he had spent his summers. Often he had lain awake at night, restless with the memory of heliotrope, and phlox, and mignonette, and afternoons quiet except for the sound of bees.

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